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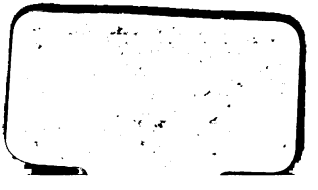

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Kester

"THE MANAGER OF THE B & A" IS THE SEVENTH OF TWELVE AMERICAN NOVELS TO BE PUBLISHED BY HARPER & BROTHERS DURING 1901, WRITTEN FOR THE MOST PART BY NEW AMERICAN WRITERS, AND DEALING WITH DIFFERENT PHASES OF CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN LIFE.

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THE MANAGER OF THE B & A

A Novel

By

Vaughan Kester

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Dedicated

TO

THE MEMORY OF MY UNCLE

HARRY WATKINS

The Manager of the B. & A.

CHAPTER I

OAKLEY was alone in the bare general offices of the Huckleberry Line—as the Buckhorn and Antioch Railroad was commonly called by the public, which it betrayed in the matter of meals and connections. He was lolling lazily over his desk with a copy of the local paper before him, and the stem of a disreputable cob pipe between his teeth.

The business of the day was done, and the noise and hurry attending its doing had given way to a sudden hush. Other sounds than those that had filled the ear since morning grew out of the stillness. Big drops of rain driven by the wind splashed softly against the unpainted pine door which led into the yards, or fell with a gay patter on the corrugated tin roof overhead. No. 7, due at 5.40, had just pulled out with twenty minutes to make up between Antioch and Harrison, the western terminus of the line. The six-o'clock whistle had blown, and the men from the car shops, a dingy, one-story building that joined the general offices on the east, were straggling off

home. Across the tracks at the ugly little depot the ticket-agent and telegraph-operator had locked up and hurried away under one umbrella the moment No. 7 was clear of the platform. From the yards every one was gone but Milton McClintock, the master mechanic, and Dutch Pete, the yard boss. Protected by dripping yellow oil-skins, they were busy repairing a wheezy switch engine that had been incontinently backed into a siding and the caboose of a freight.

Oakley was waiting the return of Clarence, the office-boy, whom he had sent up-town to the post-office. Having read the two columns of local and personal gossip arranged under the heading "People You Know," he swept his newspaper into the waste-basket and pushed back his chair. The window nearest his desk overlooked the yards and a long line of shabby day coaches and battered freight cars on one of the sidings. They were there to be rebuilt or repaired. This meant a new lease of life to the shops, which had never proved profitable.

Oakley had been with the Huckleberry two months. The first intimation the office force received that the new man whom they had been expecting for over a week had arrived in Antioch, and was prepared to take hold, was when he walked into the office and quietly introduced himself to Kerr and Holt. Former general managers had arrived by special after much preliminary wiring. The manner of their going had been less spectacular. They one and all failed, and Gen-

eral Cornish cut short the days of their pride and display.

Naturally the office had been the least bit skeptical concerning Oakley and his capabilities, but within a week a change was patent to every one connected with the road: the trains began to regard their schedules, and the slackness and unthrift in the yards gave place to an ordered prosperity. Without any apparent effort he found work for the shops, a few extra men even were taken on, and there was no hint as yet of half-time for the summer months.

He was a broad-shouldered, long-limbed, energetic young fellow, with frank blue eyes that looked one squarely in the face. Men liked him because he was straightforward, alert, and able, with an indefinite personal charm that lifted him out of the ordinary. These were the qualities Cornish had recognized when he put him in control of his interests at Antioch, and Oakley, who enjoyed hard work, had earned his salary several times over and was really doing wonders.

He put down his pipe, which was smoked out, and glanced at the clock. "What's the matter with that boy?" he muttered.

The matter was that Clarence had concluded to take a brief vacation. After leaving the post-office he skirted a vacant lot and retired behind his father's red barn, where he applied himself diligently to the fragment of a cigarette that earlier in the day McClintock, to his great scandal, had discovered him smoking in the solitude of an empty box-car in the

yards. The master mechanic, who had boys of his own, had called him a runty little cuss, and had sent him flying up the tracks with a volley of bad words ringing in his ears.

When the cigarette was finished, the urchin bethought him of the purpose of his errand. This so worked upon his fears that he bolted for the office with all the speed of his short legs. As he ran he promised himself, emotionally, that "the boss" was likely to "skin" him. But whatever his fears, he dashed into Oakley's presence, panting and in hot haste. "Just two letters for you, Mr. Oakley!" he gasped. "That was all there was!"

He went over to the superintendent and handed him the letters. Oakley observed him critically and with a dry smile. For an instant the boy hung his head sheepishly, then his face brightened.

"It's an awfully wet day; it's just sopping!"

Oakley waived this bit of gratuitous information.

"Did you run all the way?"

"Yep, every step," with the impudent mendacity that comes of long practice.

"It's rather curious you didn't get back sooner."

Clarence looked at the clock.

"Was I gone long? It didn't seem long to me," he added, with a candor he intended should disarm criticism.

"Only a little over half an hour, Clarence."

The superintendent sniffed suspiciously.

"McClintock says he caught you smoking a cigarette to-day—how about it?"

"Cubebs," in a faint voice.

The superintendent sniffed again and scrutinized the boy's hands, which rested on the corner of his desk.

"What's that on your fingers?"

Clarence considered.

"That? Why, that must be walnut-stains from last year. Didn't you ever get walnut-stains on your hands when you was a boy, Mr. Oakley?"

"I suppose so, but I don't remember that they lasted all winter."

Clarence was discreetly silent. He felt that the chief executive of the Huckleberry took too great an interest in his personal habits. Besides, it was positively painful to have to tell lies that went so wide of the mark as his had gone.

"I guess you may as well go home now. But I wouldn't smoke any more cigarettes, if I were you," gathering up his letters.

"Good-night, Mr. Oakley," with happy alacrity.

"Good-night, Clarence."

The door into the yards closed with a bang, and Clarence, gleefully skipping the mud-puddles which lay in his path, hurried his small person off through the rain and mist.

Oakley glanced at his letters. One he saw was from General Cornish. It proved to be a brief note, scribbled in pencil on the back of a telegram blank. The general would arrive in Antioch that night on the late train. He wished Oakley to meet him.

The other letter was in an unfamiliar hand. Oakley opened it. Like the first, it was brief and to the point, but he did not at once grasp its meaning. This is what he read:

"DEAR SIR,—I enclose two newspaper clippings which fully explain themselves. Your father is much interested in knowing your whereabouts. I have not furnished him with any definite information on this point, as I have not felt at liberty to do so. However, I was able to tell him I believed you were doing well. Should you desire to write him, I will gladly undertake to see that any communication you may send care of this office will reach him. Very sincerely yours,

"EZRA HART."

It was like a bolt from a clear sky. He drew a deep, quick breath. Then he took up the newspaper clippings. One was a florid column-and-a-half account of a fire in the hospital ward of the Massachusetts State prison, and dealt particularly with the heroism of Roger Oakley, a life prisoner, in leading a rescue. The other clipping, merely a paragraph, was of more recent date. It announced that Roger Oakley had been pardoned.

Oakley had scarcely thought of his father in years. The man and his concerns—his crime and his tragic atonement — had passed completely out of his life, but now he was free, if he chose, to enter it again. There was such suddenness in the thought that he turned sick on the moment; a great wave of self-pity enveloped him, the recollection of his struggles and his shame—the bitter, helpless shame of a child

— returned. He felt only resentment towards this man whose crime had blasted his youth, robbing him of every ordinary advantage, and clearly the end was not yet.

True, by degrees, he had grown away from the memory of it all. He had long since freed himself of the fear that his secret might be discovered. With success, he had even acquired a certain complacency. Without knowing his history, the good or the bad of it, his world had accepted him for what he was really worth. He was neither cowardly nor selfish. It was not alone the memory of his own hardships that embittered him and turned his heart against his father. His mother's face, with its hunted, fugitive look, rose up before him in protest. He recalled their wanderings in search of some place where their story was not known and where they could begin life anew, their return to Burton, and then her death.

For years it had been like a dream, and now he saw only the slouching figure of the old convict, which seemed to menace him, and remembered only the evil consequent upon his crime.

Next he fell to wondering what sort of a man this Roger Oakley was who had seemed so curiously remote, who had been as a shadow in his way preceding the presence, and suddenly he found his heart softening towards him. It was infinitely pathetic to the young man, with his abundant strength and splendid energy; this imprisonment that had endured for almost a quarter of a century. He fan-

cied his father as broken and friendless, as dazed and confused by his unexpected freedom, with his place in the world forever lost. After all, he could not sit in judgment, or avenge.

So far as he knew he had never seen his father but once. First there had been a hot, dusty journey by stage, then he had gone through a massive iron gate and down a narrow passage, where he had trotted by his mother's side, holding fast to her hand.

All this came back in a jerky, disconnected fashion, with wide gaps and lapses he could not fill, but the impression made upon his mind by his father had been lasting and vivid. He still saw him as he was then, with the chalky prison pallor on his haggard face. A clumsily made man of tremendous bone and muscle, who had spoken with them through the bars of his cell-door, while his mother cried softly behind her shawl. The boy had thought of him as a man in a cage.

He wondered who Ezra Hart was, for the name seemed familiar. At length he placed him. He was the lawyer who had defended his father. He was puzzled that Hart knew where he was; he had hoped the little New England village had lost all track of him, but the fact that Hart did know convinced him it would be quite useless to try to keep his whereabouts a secret from his father, even if he wished to. Since Hart knew, there must be others, also, who knew.

He took up the newspaper clippings again. By an odd coincidence they had reached him on the very

day the Governor of Massachusetts had set apart for his father's release.

Outside, in the yards, on the drenched town, and in the sweating fields beyond, the warm spring rain fell and splashed.

It was a fit time for Roger Oakley to leave the gray walls, and the gray garb he had worn so long, and to re-enter the world of living things and the life of the one person in all that world who had reason to remember him.

CHAPTER II

OAKLEY drew down the top of his desk and left the office. Before locking the door, on which some predecessor had caused the words, "Department of Transportation and Maintenance. No admittance, except on business," to be stencilled in black letters, he called to McClintock, who, with Dutch Pete, was still fussing over the wheezy switch-engine.

"Will you want in the office for anything, Milt?"

The master-mechanic, who had been swearing at a rusted nut, got up from his knees and, dangling a big wrench in one hand, bawled back: "No, I guess not."

"How's the job coming on?"

"About finished. Damn that fool Bennett, anyhow! Next time he runs this old bird-cage into a freight, he'll catch hell from me!"

After turning the key on the Department of Transportation and Maintenance, Oakley crossed the tracks to the station and made briskly off up-town, with the wind and rain blowing in his face.

He lived at the American House, the best hotel the place could boast. It overlooked the public square, a barren waste an acre or more in extent,

built about with stores and offices; where, on hot summer Saturdays, farmers who had come to town to trade, hitched their teams in the deep shade of the great maples that grew close to the curb. Here, on Decoration Day and the Fourth of July, the eloquence of the county assembled and commuted its proverbial peck of dirt in favor of very fine dust. Here, too, the noisiest of brass-bands made hideous hash of patriotic airs, and the forty odd youths constituting the local militia trampled the shine from each other's shoes, while their captain, who had been a sutler's clerk in the Civil War, cursed them for a lot of lunkheads. And at least once in the course of each summer's droning flight the spot was abandoned to the purely carnal delights of some wandering road circus.

In short, Antioch had its own life and interests, after the manner of every other human ant-hill; and the Honorable Jeb Barrow's latest public utterance, Dippy Ellsworth's skill on the snare-drum, or "Cap" Roberts's military genius, and whether or not the Civil War would really have ended at Donelson if Grant had only been smart enough to take his advice, were all matters of prime importance and occupied just as much time to weigh properly and consider as men's interests do anywhere.

In Antioch, Oakley was something of a figure. He was the first manager of the road to make the town his permanent headquarters, and the town was grateful. It would have swamped him with kindly attention, but he had studiously ignored all advances,

preferring not to make friends. In this he had not entirely succeeded. The richest man in the county, Dr. Emory, who was a good deal of a patrician, had taken a fancy to him, and had insisted upon entertaining him at a formal dinner, at which there were present the Methodist minister, the editor of the local paper, the principal merchant, a judge, and an ex-Congressman, who went to sleep with the soup and only wakened in season for the ice-cream. It was the most impressive function Oakley had ever attended, and even to think of it still sent the cold chills coursing down his spine.

That morning he had chanced to meet Dr. Emory on the street, and the doctor, who could always be trusted to say exactly what he thought, had taken him to task for not calling. There was a reason why Oakley had not done so. The doctor's daughter had just returned from the East, and vague rumors were current concerning her beauty and elegance. Now, women were altogether beyond Oakley's ken. However, since some responsive courtesy was evidently expected of him, he determined to have it over with at once. Imbued with this idea, he went to his room after supper to dress. As he arrayed himself for the ordeal, he sought to recall a past experience in line with the present. Barring the recent dinner, his most ambitious social experiment had been a brakesmen's ball in Denver, years before, when he was conductor on a freight. He laughed softly as he fastened his tie.

"I wonder what Dr. Emory would think if I told

him I'd punched a fellow at a dance once because he wanted to take my girl away from me." He recalled, as pointing his innate conservatism, that he had decided not to repeat the experiment until he achieved a position where a glittering social success was not contingent upon his ability to punch heads.

It was still raining, a discouragingly persistent drizzle, when Oakley left his hotel and turned from the public square into Main Street. This Main Street was never an imposing thoroughfare, and a week of steady downpour made it from curb to curb a river of quaking mud. It was lit at long intervals by flickering gas-lamps that glowed like corpulent fireflies in the misty darkness beneath the dripping maple-boughs. As in the case of most Western towns, Antioch had known dreams of greatness, dreams which had not been realized. It stood stock-still, in all its raw, ugly youth, with the rigid angularity its founders had imposed upon it when they hacked and hewed a spot for it in the pine-woods, whose stunted second growth encircled it on every side.

The Emory home had once been a farm-house of the better class; various additions and improvements gave it an air of solid and substantial comfort unusual in a community where the prevailing style of architecture was a square wooden box, built close to the street end of a narrow lot.

The doctor himself answered Oakley's ring, and led the way into the parlor, after relieving him of his hat and umbrella.

"My wife you know, Mr. Oakley. This is my daughter."

Constance Emory rose from her seat before the wood fire that smoldered on the wide, old-fashioned hearth, and gave Oakley her hand. He saw a stately, fair-haired girl, trimly gowned in an evening dress that to his unsophisticated gaze seemed astonishingly elaborate. But he could not have imagined anything more becoming. He decided that she was very pretty. Later he changed his mind. She was more than pretty.

For her part, Miss Emory saw merely a tall young fellow, rather good-looking than otherwise, who was feeling nervously for his cuffs. Beyond this there was not much to be said in his favor, but she was willing to be amused.

She had been absent from Antioch four years. These years had been spent in the East, and in travel abroad with a widowed and childless sister of her father's. She was, on the whole, glad to be home again. As yet she was not disturbed by any thoughts of the future. She looked on the world with serene eyes. They were a limpid blue, and veiled by long, dark lashes. She possessed the poise and unshaken self-confidence that comes of position and experience. Her father and mother were not so well satisfied with the situation; they already recognized that it held the elements of a tragedy. In their desire to give her every opportunity they had overreached themselves. She had outgrown Antioch as surely as she had outgrown her childhood, and it was as

impossible to take her back to the one as to the other.

The doctor patted Oakley on the shoulder.

"I am glad you've dropped in. I hope, now you have made a beginning, we shall see more of you."

He was a portly man of fifty, with kindly eyes and an easy, gracious manner. Mrs. Emory was sedate and placid, a handsome, well-kept woman, who administered her husband's affairs with a steadiness and economy that had made it possible for him to amass a comfortable fortune from his straggling country practice.

Constance soon decided that Oakley was not at all like the young men of Antioch as she recalled them, nor was he like the men she had known while under her aunt's tutelage—the leisurely idlers who drifted with the social tide, apparently without responsibility or care.

He proved hopelessly dense on those matters with which they had been perfectly familiar. It seemed to her that pleasure and accomplishment, as she understood them, had found no place in his life. The practical quality in his mind showed at every turn of the conversation. He appeared to hunger after hard facts, and the harder these facts were the better he liked them. But he offended in more glaring ways. He was too intense, and his speech too careful and precise, as if he were uncertain as to his grammar, as, indeed, he was.

Poor Oakley was vaguely aware that he was not getting on, and the strain told. It slowly dawned

upon him that he was not her sort, that where he was concerned, she was quite alien, quite foreign, with interests he could not comprehend, but which gave him a rankling sense of inferiority.

He had been moderately well satisfied with himself, as indeed he had good reason to be, but her manner was calculated to rob him of undue pride; he was not accustomed to being treated with mixed indifference and patronage. He asked himself resentfully how it happened that he had never before met such a girl. She fascinated him. The charm of her presence seemed to suddenly create and satisfy a love for the beautiful. With generous enthusiasm he set to work to be entertaining. Then a realization of the awful mental poverty in which he dwelt burst upon him for the first time. He longed for some light and graceful talent with which to bridge the wide gaps between the stubborn heights of his professional erudition.

He was profoundly versed on rates, grades, ballast, motive power, and rolling stock, but this solid information was of no avail. He could on occasion talk to a swearing section-boss with a grievance and a brogue in a way to make that man his friend for life; he also possessed the happy gift of inspiring his subordinates with a zealous sense of duty, but his social responsibilities numbed his faculties and left him a bankrupt for words.

The others gave him no assistance. Mrs. Emory, smiling and good-humored, but silent, bent above her sewing. She was not an acute person, and the

situation was lost upon her, while the doctor took only the most casual part in the conversation.

Oakley was wondering how he could make his escape, when the door-bell rang. The doctor slipped from the parlor. When he returned he was not alone. He was preceded by a dark young man of one or two and thirty. This was Griffith Ryder, the owner of the Antioch *Herald.*

"My dear," said he, "Mr. Ryder." Ryder shook hands with the two ladies, and nodded carelessly to Oakley; then, with an easy, graceful compliment, he lounged down in a chair at Miss Emory's side.

Constance had turned from the strenuous Oakley to the new-comer with a sense of unmistakable relief. Her mother, too, brightened visibly. She did not entirely approve of Ryder, but he was always entertaining in a lazy, indifferent fashion of his own.

"I see, Griff," the doctor said, "that you are going to support Kenyon. I declare it shakes my confidence in you." And he drew forward his chair. Like most Americans, the physician was something of a politician, and, as is also true of most Americans, not professionally concerned in the hunt for office, this interest fluctuated between the two extremes of party enthusiasm before and non-partisan disgust after elections.

Ryder smiled faintly. "Yes, we know just how much of a rascal Kenyon is, and we know nothing at all about the other fellow, except that he wants the nomination, which is a bad sign. Suppose he should turn out a greater scamp! Really it's too

much of a risk," he drawled, with an affectation of contempt.

"Your politics always were a shock to your friends, but this serves to explain them," remarked the doctor, with latent combativeness. But Ryder was not to be beguiled into argument. He turned again to Miss Emory.

"Your father is not a practical politician, or he would realize that it is only common thrift to send Kenyon back, for I take it he has served his country not without profit to himself; besides, he is clamorous and persistent, and there seems no other way to dispose of him. It's either that or the penitentiary."

Constance laughed softly. "And so you think he can afford to be honest now? What shocking ethics!"

"That is my theory. Anyhow, I don't see why your father should wish me to forego the mild excitement of assisting to re-elect my more or less disreputable friend. Antioch has had very little to offer one until you came," he added, with gentle deference. Miss Emory accepted the compliment with the utmost composure. Once she had been rather flattered by his attentions, but four years make a great difference. Either he had lost in cleverness, or she had gained in knowledge.

He was a very tired young man. At one time he had possessed some expectations and numerous pretensions. The expectation had faded out of his life, but the pretence remained in the absence of any vital achievement. He was college-bred, and had

gone in for literature. From literature he had drifted into journalism, and had ended in Antioch as proprietor of the local paper, which he contrived to edit with a lively irresponsibility that won him few friends, though it did gain him some small reputation as a humorist.

His original idea had been that the management of a country weekly would afford him opportunity for the serious work which he believed he could do, but he had not done this serious work, and was not likely to do it. He derived a fair income from the *Herald*, and he allowed his ambitions to sink into abeyance, in spite of his cherished conviction that he was cut out for bigger things. Perhaps he had wisely decided that his pretensions were much safer than accomplishment, since the importance of what a man actually does can generally be measured, while what he might do admits of exaggerated claims.

Oakley had known Ryder only since the occasion of the doctor's dinner, and felt that he could never be more than an acquired taste, if at all.

The editor took the floor, figuratively speaking, for Miss Emory's presence made the effort seem worth his while. He promptly relieved Oakley of the necessity to do more than listen, an act of charity for which the latter was hardly as grateful as he should have been. He was no fool, but there were wide realms of enlightenment where he was an absolute stranger, so, when Constance and Ryder came to talk of books and music, as they did finally, his only refuge was in silence, and he went into a sort of in-

tellectual quarantine. His reading had been strictly limited to scientific works, and to the half-dozen trade and technical journals to which he subscribed, and from which he drew the larger part of his mental sustenance. As for music, he was familiar with the airs from the latest popular operas, but the masterpieces were utterly unknown, except such as had been brought to his notice by having sleeping-cars named in their honor, a practice he considered very complimentary, and possessing value as a strong commercial endorsement.

He amused himself trying to recall whether it was the "Tannhäuser" or the "Lohengrin" he had ridden on the last time he was East. He was distinctly shocked, however, by "Götterdämmerung," which was wholly unexpected. It suggested such hard swearing, or Dutch Pete's untrammelled observations in the yards when he had caught an urchin stealing scrap-iron—a recognized source of revenue to the youth of Antioch. But he felt more and more lonely and aloof as the evening wore on. It was something of the same feeling he had known as a boy, after his mother's death, when, homeless and friendless at night, he had paused to glance in through uncurtained windows, with a dumb, wordless longing for the warmth and comfort he saw there.

It was a relief when the doctor took him into the library to examine specimens of iron-ore he had picked up west of Antioch, where there were undeveloped mineral lands for which he was trying to secure capital. This was a matter Oakley was in-

terested in, since it might mean business for the road. He promptly forgot about Miss Emory and the objectionable Ryder, and in ten minutes gave the doctor a better comprehension of the mode of procedure necessary to success than that gentleman had been able to learn in ten years of unfruitful attempting. He also supplied him with a few definite facts and figures in lieu of the multitude of glittering generalities on which he had been pinning his faith as a means of getting money into the scheme.

When, at last, they returned to the parlor, they found another caller had arrived during their absence, a small, shabbily dressed man, with a high, bald head and weak, near-sighted eyes. It was Turner Joyce. Oakley knew him just as he was beginning to know every other man, woman, and child in the town.

Joyce rose hastily, or rather stumbled to his feet, as the doctor and Oakley entered the room.

"I told you I was coming up, doctor," he said, apologetically. "Miss Constance has been very kind. She has been telling me of the galleries and studios. What a glorious experience!"

A cynical smile parted Ryder's thin lips.

"Mr. Joyce feels the isolation of his art here."

The little man blinked doubtfully at the speaker, and then said, with a gentle, deprecatory gesture, "I don't call it art."

"You are far too modest. I have heard my foreman speak in the most complimentary terms of the portrait you did of his wife. He was especially

pleased with the frame. You must know, Miss Constance, that Mr. Joyce usually furnishes the frames, and his pictures go home ready to the wire to hang on the wall."

Mr. Joyce continued to blink doubtfully at Ryder. He scarcely knew how to take the allusion to the frames. It was a sore point with him.

Constance turned with a displeased air from Ryder to the little artist. There was a faint, wistful smile on her lips. He was a rather pathetic figure to her, and she could not understand how Ryder dared or had the heart to make fun.

"I shall enjoy seeing all that you have done, Mr. Joyce; and of course I wish to see Ruth. Why didn't she come with you to-night?"

"Her cousin, Lou Bentick's wife, is dead, and she has been over at his house all day. She was quite worn out, but she sent you her love."

Ryder glanced again at Miss Emory, and said, with hard cynicism: "The notice will appear in Saturday's *Herald*, with a tribute from her pastor. I never refuse his verse. It invariably contains some scathing comment on the uncertainty of the Baptist faith as a means of salvation."

But this was wasted on Joyce. Ryder rose with a sigh.

"Well, we toilers must think of the morrow."

Oakley accepted this as a sign that it was time to go. Joyce, too, stumbled across the room to the door, and the three men took their leave together. As they stood on the steps, the doctor said, cordially,

"I hope you will both come again soon; and you, too, Turner," he added, kindly.

Ryder moved off quickly with Oakley. Joyce would have dropped behind, but the latter made room for him at his side. No one spoke until Ryder, halting on a street corner, said, "Sorry, but it's out of my way to go any farther unless you'll play a game of billiards with me at the hotel, Oakley."

"Thanks," curtly. "I don't play billiards."

"No? Well, they are a waste of time, I suppose. Good-night." And he turned down the side street, whistling softly.

"A very extraordinary young man," murmured Joyce, rubbing the tip of his nose meditatively with a painty forefinger. "And with quite an extraordinary opinion of himself."

A sudden feeling of friendliness prompted Oakley to tuck his hand through the little artist's arm. "How is Bentick bearing the loss of his wife?" he asked. "You said she was your cousin."

"No, not mine. My wife's. Poor fellow! he feels it keenly. They had not been married long, you know."

The rain was falling in a steady downpour. They had reached Turner Joyce's gate, and paused.

"Won't you come in and wait until it moderates, Mr. Oakley?"

Oakley yielded an assent, and followed him through the gate and around the house.

CHAPTER III

THERE were three people in the kitchen, the principal living room of the Joyce home—Christopher Berry, the undertaker; Jeffy, the local outcast, a wretched ruin of a man; and Turner Joyce's wife, Ruth.

Jeffy was seated at a table, eating. He was a cousin of the Benticks, and Mrs. Joyce had furnished him with a complete outfit from her husband's slender wardrobe for the funeral on the morrow.

Oakley had never known him to be so well or so wonderfully dressed, and he had seen him in a number of surprising costumes. His black trousers barely reached the tops of his shoes, while the sleeves of his shiny Prince Albert stopped an inch or more above his wrists; he furthermore appeared to be in imminent danger of strangulation, such was the height and tightness of his collar. The thumb and forefinger of his right hand were gone, the result of an accident at a Fourth of July celebration, where, at the instigation of Mr. Gid Runyon—a gentleman possessing a lively turn of mind and gifted with a keen sense of humor—he had undertaken to hold a giant fire-cracker while it exploded, the inducement being a quart of whiskey, gener-

ously donated for the occasion by Mr. Runyon himself.

Mrs. Joyce had charged herself with Jeffy's care. She was fearful that he might escape and sell his clothes before the funeral. She knew they would go immediately after, but then he would no longer be in demand as a mourner.

As for Jeffy, he was feeling the importance of his position. With a fine sense of what was expected from him as a near relative he had spent the day in the stricken home: its most picturesque figure, seated bolt upright in the parlor, a spotless cotton handkerchief in his hand, and breathing an air of chastened sorrow.

He had exchanged mournful greetings with the friends of the family, and was conscious that he had acquitted himself to the admiration of all. The Swede "help," who was new to Antioch, had thought him a person of the first distinction, so great was the curiosity merely to see him.

Christopher Berry was a little, dried-up man of fifty, whose name was chance, but whose profession was choice. He was his own best indorsement, for he was sere and yellow, and gave out a faint, dry perfume as of drugs, or tuberoses. "Well, Mrs. Joyce," he was saying, as Oakley and the little artist entered the room, "I guess there ain't nothing else to settle. Don't take it so to heart; there are grand possibilities in death, even if we can't always realize them, and we got a perfect body. I can't remember when I seen death so majestic, and I may say —ca'm."

Mrs. Joyce, who was crying, dried her eyes on the corner of her apron.

"Wasn't it sad about Smith Roberts's wife! And with all those children! Dear, dear! It's been such a sickly spring!"

The undertaker's face assumed an expression of even deeper gloom than was habitual to it. He coughed dryly and decorously behind his hand.

"They called in the other undertaker. I won't say I didn't feel it, Mrs. Joyce, for I did. I'd had the family trade, one might say, always. There was her father, his mother, two of her brothers, and the twins. You recollect the two twins, Mrs. Joyce, typhoid—in one day," with as near an approach to enthusiasm as he ever allowed himself.

"Mrs. Poppleton told me over at Lou's that it was about the pleasantest funeral she'd ever been to, and it's durn few she's missed, I'm telling you!" remarked the outcast, hoarsely. He usually slept at the gas-house in the winter on a convenient pile of hot cinders, and was troubled with a bronchial affection. "She said she'd never seen so many flowers. Some of Roberts's folks sent 'em here all the ways from Chicago. Say! that didn't cost—oh no! I just wisht I'd the money. It'd do me for a spell."

"Well, they may have had finer flowers than we got, but the floral offerings weren't much when the twins passed away. I remember thinking then that was a time for display, if one wanted display. Twins, you know—typhoid, too, and in one day!" He

coughed dryly again behind his hand. "I wouldn't worry, Mrs. Joyce. Their body didn't compare with our body, and the body's the main thing, after all." With which professional view of the case he took himself out into the night.

The outcast gave way to a burst of hoarse, throaty mirth. "It just makes Chris Berry sick to think there's any other undertakers, but he knows his business; I'll say that for him any time."

He turned aggressively on Joyce. "Did you get me them black gloves? Now, don't give me no fairy tales, for I know durn well from your looks you didn't."

"I'll get them for you the first thing in the morning, Jeffy."

Jeffy brandished his fork angrily in the air.

"I never seen such a slip-shod way of doing things. I'd like to know what sort of a funeral it's going to be if I don't get them black gloves. It'll be a failure. Yes, sir, the durndest sort of a failure! All the Chris Berrys in the world can't save it. I declare I don't see why I got to have all this ornery worry. It ain't my funeral!"

"Hush, Jeffy!" said Mrs. Joyce. "You mustn't take on so."

"Why don't he get me them gloves?" And he glared fiercely at the meek figure of the little artist. Then suddenly he subsided. "Reach me the pie, Ruthy."

Mrs. Joyce turned nervously to her husband.

"Aren't you going to show Mr. Oakley your pictures, Turner?"

"Would you care to see them?" with some trepidation.

"If you will let me," with a grave courtesy that was instinctive.

Joyce took a lamp from the mantel. "You will come, too, Ruth?" he said. His wife was divided between her sense of responsibility and her desires. She nodded helplessly towards the outcast, where he grovelled noisily over his food.

"Jeffy will stay here until we come back, won't you, Jeffy?" ventured Joyce, insinuatingly.

"Sure I will. There isn't anything to take me out, unless it's them black gloves."

Mrs. Joyce led the way into the hall. "I am so afraid when he's out of my sight," she explained to Oakley. "We've had such trouble in getting him put to rights. I couldn't go through it again. He's so trying."

The parlor had been fitted up as a studio. There were cheap draperies on the walls, and numerous pictures and sketches. In one corner was a shelf of books, with Somebody's *Lives of the Painters* ostentatiously displayed. Standing on the floor, their faces turned in, were three or four unfinished canvases. There was also a miscellaneous litter about the room, composed of Indian relics and petrified wood.

It was popularly supposed that an artist naturally took an interest in curios of this sort, his life being devoted to an impractical search after the beautiful, and the farmer who ploughed up a petrified rail, or

discovered an Indian hand-mill, carted it in to poor Joyce, who was too tender-hearted to rebel; consequently he had been the recipient of several tons of broken rock, and would have been swamped by the accumulation, had not Mrs. Joyce from time to time conveyed these offerings to the back yard.

Joyce held the lamp, so Oakley might have a better view of the pictures on the wall.

"Perhaps you will like to see my earlier paintings first. There! Is the light good? That was Mrs. Joyce just after our marriage."

Oakley saw a plump young lady, with her hair elaborately banged and a large bouquet in her hand. The background was a landscape, with a ruined Greek temple in the distance. "Here she is a year later; and here she is again, and over there in the corner above my easel."

He swept the lamp back to the first picture. "She hasn't changed much, has she?"

Oakley was no critic, yet he realized that the little artist's work was painfully literal and exact, but then he had a sneaking idea that a good photograph was more satisfactory than an oil painting, anyhow.

What he could comprehend and appreciate, however, was Mrs. Joyce's attitude towards her husband's masterpieces. She was wholly and pathetically reverent. It was the sublime, unshaken faith and approval that marriage sometimes wins for a man.

"I am so sorry the light isn't any better. Mr. Oakley must come in in the afternoon," she said, anxiously.

"I suppose you have seen some of the best examples of the modern painters," said Joyce, with a tinge of wistful envy in his tones. "You know I never have. I haven't been fifty miles from Antioch in my life."

Oakley was ashamed to admit that the modern painters were the least of his cares, so he said nothing.

"That's just like Mr. Joyce. He is always doubting his ability, and every one says he gets wonderful likenesses."

"I guess," said Oakley, awkwardly, inspired by a feeling of large humanity, "I guess you'll have to be my guest when I go East this fall. You know I can always manage transportation," he added, hastily.

"Oh, that would be lovely!" cried Mrs. Joyce, in an ecstasy of happiness at the mere thought. "Could you?"

Joyce, with a rather unsteady hand, placed the lamp on the centre-table and gazed at his new friend with a gratitude that went beyond words.

Oakley recognized that in a small way he was committed as a patron of the arts, but he determined to improve upon his original offer, and send Mrs. Joyce with her husband. She would enter into the spirit of his pleasure as no one else could.

"Can't I see more of your work?" he asked, anxious to avoid any expression of gratitude.

"I wish you'd show Mr. Oakley what you are doing now, Turner. He may give you some valuable criticisms."

For, by that unique, intuitive process of reasoning peculiar to women, she had decided that Oakley's judgment must be as remarkable as his generosity.

His words roused Joyce, who had stood all this while with misty eyes blinking at Oakley. He turned and took a fresh canvas from among those leaning against the wall and rested it on the easel. "This is a portrait I'm doing of Jared Thorne's daughter. I haven't painted in the eyes yet. That's a point they can't agree upon. You see, there's a slight cast—"

"She's cross-eyed, Turner," interjected Mrs. Joyce, positively.

"Jared wants them the way they'll be after she's been to Chicago to be operated on, and his wife wants them as they are now. They are to settle it between them before she comes for the final sitting on Saturday."

"That is a complication," observed Oakley, but he did not laugh. It was not that he lacked a sense of humor. It was that he was more impressed by something else.

The little artist blinked affectionately at his work.

"Yes, it's going to be a good likeness, quite as good as any I ever got. I was lucky in my flesh tints there on the cheek," he added, tilting his head critically on one side.

"What do you think of Mr. Joyce's work?" asked Mrs. Joyce, bent on committing their visitor to an opinion.

"It is very good, indeed, and perhaps he is doing

a greater service in educating us here at Antioch than if he had made a name for himself abroad. Perhaps, too, he'll be remembered just as long."

"Do you really think so, Mr. Oakley?" said the little artist, delighted. "It may sound egotistical, but I have sometimes thought that myself—that these portraits of mine, bad as I know they must be, give a great deal of pleasure and happiness to their owners, and it's a great pleasure for me to do them, and we don't get much beyond that in this world, do we?"

CHAPTER IV

OAKLEY took the satchel from General Cornish's hand as the latter stepped from his private car.

"You got my note, I see," he said. "I think I'll go to the hotel for the rest of the night."

He glanced back over his shoulder, as he turned with Dan towards the bus which was waiting for them at the end of the platform.

"I guess no one else got off here. It's not much of a railroad centre."

"No," agreed Oakley, impartially; "there are towns where the traffic is heavier."

Arrived at the hotel, Oakley led the way up-stairs to the general's room. It adjoined his own. Cornish paused on the threshold until he had lighted the gas.

"Light the other burner, will you?" he requested. "There, thanks, that's better."

He was a portly man of sixty, with a large head and heavy face. His father had been a Vermont farmer, a man of position and means, according to the easy standard of his times. When the Civil War broke out, young Cornish, who was just commencing the practice of the law, had enlisted as

a private in one of the first regiments raised by his State. Prior to this he had overflowed with fervid oratory, and had tried hard to look like Daniel Webster, but a skirmish or two opened his eyes to the fact that the waging of war was a sober business, and the polishing off of his sentences not nearly as important as the polishing off of the enemy. He was still willing to die for the Union, if there was need of it, but while his life was spared it was well to get on. The numerical importance of number one was a belief too firmly implanted in his nature to be overthrown by any patriotic aberration.

His own merits, which he was among the first to recognize, and the solid backing his father was able to give, won him promotion. He had risen to the command of a regiment, and when the war ended was brevetted a brigadier-general of volunteers, along with a score of other anxious warriors who wished to carry the title of general back into civil life, for he was an amiable sort of a Shylock, who seldom overlooked his pound of flesh, and he usually got all, and a little more, than was coming to him.

After the war he married and went West, where he resumed the practice of his profession, but he soon abandoned it for a commercial career. It was not long until he was ranked as one of the rich men of his State. Then he turned his attention to politics. He was twice elected to Congress, and served one term as governor. One of his daughters had married an Italian prince, a meek, prosaic little creature, exactly five feet three inches tall; another was en-

gaged to an English earl, whose debts were a remarkable achievement for so young a man. His wife now divided her time between Paris and London. She didn't think much of New York, which had thought even less of her. He managed to see her once or twice a year. Any oftener would have been superfluous. But it interested him to read of her in the papers, and to feel a sense of proprietorship for this woman, who was spending his money and carrying his name into the centres of elegance and fashion. Personally he disliked fashion, and was rather shy of elegance.

There were moments, however, when he felt his life to be wholly unsatisfactory. He derived very little pleasure from all the luxury that had accumulated about him, and which he accepted with a curious placid indifference. He would have liked the affection of his children, to have had them at home, and there was a remote period in his past when his wife had inspired him with a sentiment at which he could only wonder. He held it against her that she had not understood.

He lurched down solidly into the chair Oakley placed for him. "I hope you are comfortable here," he said, kindly.

"Oh yes." He still stood.

"Sit down," said Cornish. "I don't, as a rule, believe in staying up after midnight to talk business, but I must start East to-morrow."

He slipped out of his chair and began to pace the floor, with his hands thrust deep in his trousers-

pockets. "I want to talk over the situation here. I don't see that the road is ever going to make a dollar. I've an opportunity to sell it to the M. & W. Of course this is extremely confidential. It must not go any further. I am told they will discontinue it beyond this point, and of course they will either move the shops away or close them." He paused in his rapid walk. "It's too bad it never paid. It was the first thing I did when I came West. I thought it a pretty big thing then. I have always hoped it would justify my judgment, and it promised to for a while until the lumber interests played out. Now, what do you advise, Oakley? I want to get your ideas. You understand, if I sell I won't lose much. The price offered will just about meet the mortgage I hold, but I guess the stockholders will come out at the little end of the horn."

Oakley understood exactly what was ahead of the stockholders if the road changed hands. Perhaps his face showed that he was thinking of this, for the general observed, charitably:

"It's unfortunate, but you can't mix sentiment in a transaction of this sort. I'd like to see them all get their money back, and more, too."

His mental attitude towards the world was one of generous liberality, but he had such excellent control over his impulses that, while he always seemed about to embark in some large philanthropy, he had never been known to take even the first step in that direction. In short, he was hard and unemotional, but with a deceptive, unswerving kindliness of man-

ner, which, while it had probably never involved a dollar of his riches, had at divers times cost the unwary and the indiscreet much money.

No man presided at the board meetings of a charity with an air of larger benevolence, and no man drove closer or more conscienceless bargains. His friends knew better than to trust him—a precaution they observed in common with his enemies.

"I am sure the road could be put on a paying basis," said Oakley. "Certain quite possible economies would do that. Of course we can't create business, there is just so much of it, and we get it all as it is. But the shops might be made very profitable. I have secured a good deal of work for them, and I shall secure more. I had intended to propose a number of reforms, but if you are going to sell, why, there's no use of going into the matter—" he paused.

The general meditated in silence for a moment.

"I'd hate to sacrifice my interests if I thought you could even make the road pay expenses. Now, just what do you intend to do?"

"I'll get my order-book and show you what's been done for the shops," said Oakley, rising with alacrity. "I have figured out the changes, too, and you can see at a glance just what I propose doing."

The road and the shops employed some five hundred men, most of whom had their homes in Antioch. Oakley knew that if the property was sold it would practically wipe the town out of existence. The situation was full of interest for him. If Cornish

approved, and told him to go ahead with his reforms, it would be an opportunity such as he had never known.

He went into his own room, which opened off Cornish's, and got his order-book and table of figures, which he had carried up from the office that afternoon.

They lay on the stand with a pile of trade journals. For the first time in his life he viewed these latter with an unfriendly eye. He thought of Constance Emory, and realized that he should never again read and digest the annual report of the Joint Traffic Managers' Association with the same sense of intellectual fulness it had hitherto given him. No, clearly, that was a pleasure he had outgrown.

He had taken a great deal of pains with his figures, and they seemed to satisfy Cornish that the road, if properly managed, was not such a hopeless proposition, after all. Something might be done with it.

Oakley rose in his good esteem; he had liked him, and he was justifying his good opinion. He beamed benevolently on the young man, and thawed out of his habitual reserve into a genial, ponderous frankness.

"You have done well," he said, glancing through the order-book with evident satisfaction.

"Of course," explained Oakley, "I am going to make a cut in wages this spring, if you agree to it, but I haven't the figures for this yet." The general nodded. He approved of cuts on principle.

"That's always a wise move," he said. "Will they stand it?"

"They'll have to." And Oakley laughed rather nervously. He appreciated that his reforms were likely to make him very unpopular in Antioch. "They shouldn't object. If the road changes hands it will kill their town."

"I suppose so," agreed Cornish, indifferently.

"And half a loaf is lots better than no loaf," added Oakley. Again the general nodded his approval. That was the very pith and Gospel of his financial code, and he held it as greatly to his own credit that he had always been perfectly willing to offer half-loaves.

"What sort of shape is the shop in?" he asked, after a moment's silence.

"Very good on the whole."

"I am glad to hear you say so. I spent over a hundred thousand dollars on the plant originally."

"Of course, the equipment can hardly be called modern, but it will do for the sort of work for which I am bidding," Oakley explained.

"Well, it will be an interesting problem for a young man, Oakley. If you pull the property up it will be greatly to your credit. I was going to offer you another position, but we will let that go over for the present. I am very much pleased, though, with all you have done, very much pleased, indeed. I go abroad in about two weeks. My youngest daughter is to be married in London to the Earl of Minchester." The title rolled glibly from the great

man's lips. "So you'll have the fight, if it is a fight, all to yourself. I'll see that Holloway does what you say. He's the only one you'll have to look to in my absence, but you won't be able to count on him for anything; he gets limp in a crisis. Just don't make the mistake of asking his advice."

"I'd rather have no advice," interrupted Dan, hastily, "unless it's yours," he added.

"I'll see that you are not bothered. You are the sort of fellow who will do better with a free hand, and that is what I intend you shall have."

"Thank you," said Oakley, his heart warming with the other's praise.

"I shall be back in three months, and then, if your schemes have worked out at all as we expect, why, we can consider putting the property in better shape." —A part of Oakley's plan.—"As you say, it's gone down so there won't be much but the right of way presently."

"I hope that eventually there'll be profits," said Oakley, whose mind was beginning to reach out into the future.

"I guess the stockholders will drop dead if we ever earn a dividend. That's the last thing they are looking forward to," remarked Cornish, dryly. "Will you leave a six-thirty call at the office for me? I forgot, and I must take the first train."

Oakley had gathered up his order-book and papers. The general was already fumbling with his cravat and collar.

"I am very well satisfied with your plan, and I believe you have the ability to carry it out."

He threw aside his coat and vest and sat down to take off his shoes. "Don't saddle yourself with too much work. Keep enough of an office force to save yourself wherever you can. I think, if orders continue to come in as they have been doing, the shops promise well. It just shows what a little energy will accomplish."

"With judicious nursing in the start, there should be plenty of work for us, and we are well equipped to handle it."

"Yes," agreed Cornish. "A lot of money was spent on the plant. I wanted it just right."

"I can't understand why more hasn't been done with the opportunity here."

"I've never been able to find the proper man to take hold, until I found you, Oakley. You have given me a better insight into conditions than I have had at any time since I built the road, and it ain't such a bad proposition, after all, especially the shops." The general turned out the gas as he spoke, and Oakley, as he stood in the doorway of his own room, saw dimly a white figure moving in the direction of the bed.

"I'd figure close on all repair work. The thing is to get them into the habit of coming to us. Don't forget the call, please. Six-thirty sharp."

The slats creaked and groaned beneath his weight. "Good-night."

CHAPTER V

THE next morning Oakley saw General Cornish off on the 7.15 train, and then went back to his hotel for breakfast. Afterwards, on his way to the office he mailed a check to Ezra Hart for his father. The money was intended to meet his expenses in coming West.

He was very busy all that day making out his new schedules, and in figuring the cuts and just what they would amount to. He approached his task with a certain reluctance, for it was as unpleasant to him personally as it was necessary to the future of the road, and he knew that no half-way measures would suffice. He must cut, as a surgeon cuts, to save. By lopping away a man here and there, giving his work to some other man, or dividing it up among two or three men, he managed to peel off two thousand dollars on the year. He counted that a very fair day's work.

He would start his reform with no particular aggressiveness. He would retire the men he intended to dismiss from the road one at a time. He hoped they would take the hint and hunt other positions. At any rate, they could not get back until he was ready to take them back, as Cornish had assured

him he would not be interfered with. He concluded not to hand the notices and orders to Miss Walton, the typewriter, to copy. She might let drop some word that would give his victims an inkling of what was in store for them. He knew there were unpleasant scenes ahead of him, but there was no need to anticipate. When at last his figures for the cuts were complete he would have been grateful for some one with whom to discuss the situation. All at once his responsibilities seemed rather heavier than he had bargained for.

There were only two men in the office besides himself—Philip Kerr, the treasurer, and Byron Holt, his assistant. They were both busy with the payroll, as it was the sixth of the month, and they commenced to pay off in the shops on the tenth.

He had little or no use for Kerr, who still showed, where he dared, in small things his displeasure that an outsider had been appointed manager of the road. He had counted on the place for himself for a number of years, but a succession of managers had come and gone apparently without its ever having occurred to General Cornish that an excellent executive was literally spoiling in the big, bare, general offices of the line.

This singular indifference on the part of Cornish to his real interests had soured a disposition that at its best had more of acid in it than anything else. As there was no way in which he could make his resentment known to the general, even if he had deemed such a course expedient, he took it out of Oakley,

and kept his feeling for him on ice. Meanwhile he bided his time, hoping for Oakley's downfall and his own eventual recognition.

With the assistant treasurer, Dan's relations were entirely cordial. Holt was a much younger man than Kerr, as frank and open as the other was secret and reserved. When the six-o'clock whistle blew he glanced up from his work and said:

"I wish you'd wait a moment, Holt. I want to see you."

Kerr had already gone home, and Miss Walton was adjusting her hat before a bit of a mirror that hung on the wall back of her desk. "All right," responded Holt, cheerfully.

"Just draw up your chair," said Oakley, handing his papers to him. At first Holt did not understand; then he began to whistle softly, and fell to checking off the various cuts with his forefinger.

"What do you think of the job, Byron?" inquired Oakley.

"Well, I'm glad I don't get laid off, that's sure. Say, just bear in mind that I'm going to be married this summer."

"You needn't worry; only I didn't know that."

"Well, please don't forget it, Mr. Oakley."

Holt ran over the cuts again. Then he asked:

"Who's going to stand for this? You or the old man? I hear he was in town last night."

"I stand for it, but of course he approves."

"I'll bet he approves," and the assistant treasurer

grinned. "This is the sort of thing that suits him right down to the ground."

"How about the hands? Do you know if they are members of any union?"

"No, but there'll be lively times ahead for you. They are a great lot of kickers here."

"Wait until I get through. I haven't touched the shops yet; that's to come later. I'll skin closer before I'm done." Oakley got up and lit his pipe. "The plant must make some sort of a showing. We can't continue at the rate we have been going. I suppose you know what sort of shape it would leave the town in if the shops were closed."

"Damn poor shape, I should say. Why, it's the money that goes in and out of this office twice a month that keeps the town alive. It couldn't exist a day without that."

"Then it behooves us to see to it that nothing happens to the shops or road. I am sorry for the men I am laying off, but it can't be helped."

"I see you are going to chuck Hoadley out of his good thing at the Junction. If he was half white he'd a gone long ago. He must lay awake nights figuring how he can keep decently busy."

"Is the list all right?"

"Yes. No, it's not, either. You've marked off Joe Percell at Harrison. He used to brake for the Huckleberry until he lost an arm. His is a pension job."

"Put his name back, then. How do you think it's going to work?"

"Oh, it will work all right, because it has to, but they'll all be cussing you," with great good humor. "What's the matter, anyhow? Did the old man throw a fit at the size of the pay-roll?"

"Not exactly, but he came down here with his mind made up to sell the road to the M. & W."

"You don't say so!"

"I talked him out of that, but we must make a showing, for he's good and tired, and may dump the whole business any day."

"Well, if he does that there'll be no marrying or giving in marriage for me this summer. It will be just like a Shaker settlement where I am concerned."

Dan laughed. "Oh, you'd be all right, Holt. You'd get something else, or the M. & W. would keep you on."

"I don't know about that. A new management generally means a clean sweep all round, and my berth's a pretty good one."

In some manner a rumor of the changes Oakley proposed making did get abroad, and he was promptly made aware that his popularity in Antioch was a thing of the past. He was regarded as an oppressor from whom some elaborate and wanton tyranny might be expected. While General Cornish suffered their inefficiency, his easy-going predecessors had been content to draw their salaries and let it go at that, a line of conduct which Antioch held to be entirely proper. This new man, however, was clearly an upstart, cursed with an insane and destructive ambition to earn money from the road.

Suppose it did not pay. Cornish could go down into his pocket for the difference, just as he had always done.

What the town did not know, and what it would not have believed even if it had been told, was that the general had been on the point of selling — a change that would have brought hardship to every one. The majority of the men in the shops owned their own homes, and these homes represented the savings of years. The sudden exodus of two or three hundred families meant of necessity widespread ruin. Those who were forced to go away would have to sacrifice everything they possessed to get away, while those who remained would be scarcely better off. But Antioch never considered such a radical move as even remotely possible. It counted the shops a fixture; they had always been there, and for this sufficient reason they would always remain.

The days wore on, one very like another, with their spring heat and lethargy. Occasionally, Oakley saw Miss Emory on the street to bow to, but not to speak with; while he was grateful for these escapes, he found himself thinking of her very often. He fancied—and he was not far wrong—that she was finding Antioch very dull. He wondered, too, if she was seeing much of Ryder. He imagined that she was; and here again he was not far wrong. Now and then he was seized with what he felt to be a weak desire to call, but he always thought better of it in time, and was always grateful he had not

succumbed to the impulse. But her mere presence in Antioch seemed to make him dissatisfied and resentful of its limitations. Ordinarily he was not critical of his surroundings. Until she came, that he was without companionship and that the town was given over to a deadly inertia which expressed itself in the collapsed ambition of nearly every man and woman he knew, had scarcely affected him beyond giving him a sense of mild wonder.

He had heard nothing of his father, and in the pressure of his work and freshened interest in the fortunes of the Huckleberry, had hardly given him a second thought. He felt that, since he had sent money to him, he was in a measure relieved of all further responsibility. If his father did not wish to come to him, that was his own affair. He had placed no obstacle in his way.

He had gone through life without any demand having been made on his affections. On those rare occasions that he devoted to self-analysis he seriously questioned if he possessed any large capacity in that direction. The one touch of sentiment to which he was alive was the feeling he centred about the few square feet of turf where his mother lay under the sweet-briar and the old elms in the burying-plot of the little Eastern village. The sexton was instructed to see that the spot was not neglected, and that there were always flowers on the grave. She had loved flowers. It was somehow a satisfaction to Dan to overpay him for this care. But he had his moments of remorse, because he was unable to

go back there. Once or twice he had started East, fully intending to do so, but had weakened at the last moment. Perhaps he recognized that while it was possible to return to a place, it was not possible to return to an emotion.

Oakley fell into the habit of working at the office after the others left in the evening. He liked the quiet of the great bare room and the solitude of the silent, empty shops. Sometimes Holt remained, too, and discussed his matrimonial intentions, or entertained his superior with an account of his previous love affairs, for the experiences were far beyond his years. He had exhausted the possibilities of Antioch quite early in life. At one time or another he had either been engaged, or almost engaged, to every pretty girl in the place. He explained his seeming inconsistency, however, by saying he was naturally of a very affectionate disposition.

CHAPTER VI

LATE one afternoon, as Oakley sat at his desk in the broad streak of yellow light that the sun sent in through the west windows, he heard a step on the narrow board-walk that ran between the building and the tracks. The last shrill shriek of No. 7, as usual, half an hour late, had just died out in the distance, and the informal committee of town loafers which met each train was plodding up Main Street to the post-office in solemn silence.

He glanced around as the door into the yards opened, expecting to see either Holt or Kerr. Instead he saw a tall, gaunt man of sixty-five, a little stoop-shouldered, and carrying his weight heavily and solidly. His large head was sunk between broad shoulders. It was covered by a wonderful growth of iron-gray hair. The face was clean-shaven and had the look of a placid mask. There was a curious repose in the man's attitude as he stood with a big hand—the hand of an artisan—resting loosely on the knob of the door.

"Is it you, Dannie?"

The smile that accompanied the words was at once anxious, hesitating, and inquiring. He closed the door with awkward care and coming a step nearer,

put out his hand. Oakley, breathing hard, rose hastily from his chair, and stood leaning against the corner of his desk as if he needed its support. He was white to the lips.

There was a long pause while the two men looked into each other's eyes.

"Don't you know me, Dannie?" wistfully. Dan said nothing, but he extended his hand, and his father's fingers closed about it with a mighty pressure. Then, quite abruptly, Roger Oakley turned and walked over to the window. Once more there was absolute silence in the room, save for the ticking of the clock and the buzzing of a solitary fly high up on the ceiling.

The old convict was the first to break the tense stillness.

"I had about made up my mind I should never see you again, Dannie. When your mother died and you came West it sort of wiped out the little there was between me and the living. In fact, I really didn't know you would care to see me, and when Hart told me you wished me to come to you and had sent the money, I could hardly believe it."

Here the words failed him utterly. He turned slowly and looked into his son's face long and lovingly. "I've thought of you as a little boy for all these years, Dannie—as no higher than that," dropping his hand to his hip. "And here you are a man grown. But you got your mother's look—I'd have known you by it among a thousand."

If Dan had felt any fear of his father it had left him

the instant he entered the room. Whatever he might have done, whatever he might have been, there was no question as to the manner of man he had become. He stepped to his son's side and took his hand in one of his own.

"You've made a man of yourself. I can see that. What do you do here for a living?"

Dan laughed, queerly.

"I am the general manager of the railroad, father," nodding towards the station and the yards. "But it's not much to brag about. It's only a one-horse line," he added.

"No, you don't mean it, Dannie!" And he could see that his father was profoundly impressed. He put up his free hand and gently patted Dan's head as though he were indeed the little boy he remembered.

"Did you have an easy trip West, father?" Oakley asked. "You must be tired."

"Not a bit, Dannie. It was wonderful. I'd been shut off from it all for more than twenty years, and each mile was taking me nearer you."

The warm yellow light was beginning to fade from the room. It was growing late.

"I guess we'd better go up-town to the hotel and have our supper. Where is your trunk? At the station?"

"I've got nothing but a bundle. It's at the door."

Dan locked his desk, and they left the office.

"Is it all yours?" Roger Oakley asked, pausing as they crossed the yards, to glance up and down the curving tracks.

"It's part of the property I manage. It belongs to General Cornish, who holds most of the stock."

"And the train I came on, Dannie, who owned that?"

"At Buckhorn Junction, where you changed cars for the last time, you caught our local express. It runs through to a place called Harrison—the terminus of the line. This is only a branch road, you know."

But the explanation was lost on his father. His son's relation to the road was a magnificent fact which he pondered with simple pleasure.

After their supper at the hotel they went up-stairs. Roger Oakley had been given a room next his son's. It was the same room General Cornish had occupied when he was in Antioch.

"Would you like to put away your things now?" asked Dan, as he placed his father's bundle, which he had carried up-town from the office, on the bed.

"I'll do that by and by. There ain't much there—just a few little things I've managed to keep, or that have been given me."

Dan pushed two chairs before an open window that overlooked the square. His father had taken a huge blackened meerschaum from its case and was carefully filling it from a leather pouch.

"You don't mind if I light my pipe?" he inquired.

"Not a bit. I've one in my pocket, but it's not nearly as fine as yours."

"Our warden gave it to me one Christmas, and I've smoked it ever since. He was a very good man,

Dannie. It's the old warden I'm speaking of, not Kenyon, the new one, though he's a good man, too."

Dan wondered where he had heard the name of Kenyon before; then he remembered—it was at the Emorys'.

"Try some of my tobacco, Dannie," passing the pouch.

For a time the two men sat in silence, blowing clouds of white smoke out into the night. Under the trees, just bursting into leaf, the street-lamps flickered in a long, dim perspective, and now and then a stray word floated up to them, coming from a group of idlers on the corner below the window.

Roger Oakley hitched his chair nearer his son's, and rested a heavy hand on his knee. "I like it here," he said.

"Do you? I am glad."

"What will be the chances of my finding work? You know I'm a cabinet-maker by trade."

"There's no need of your working; so don't worry about that."

"But I must work, Dannie. I ain't used to sitting still and doing nothing."

"Well," said Oakley, willing to humor him, "there are the car shops."

"Can you get me in?"

"Oh yes, when you are ready to start. I'll have McClintock, the master mechanic, find something in your line for you to do."

"I'll need to get a kit of tools."

"I guess McClintock can arrange that, too. I'll see him about it when you are ready."

"Then that's settled. I'll begin in the morning," with quiet determination.

"But don't you want to look around first?"

"I'll have my Sundays for that." And Dan saw that there was no use in arguing the point with him. He was bent on having his own way.

The old convict filled his lungs with a deep, free breath. "Yes, I'm going to like it. I always did like a small town, anyhow. Tell me about yourself, Dannie. How do you happen to be here?"

Dan roused himself. "I don't know. It's chance, I suppose. After mother's death—"

"Twenty years ago last March," breaking in upon him, softly; then, nodding at the starlit heavens, "She's up yonder now, watching us. Nothing's hidden or secret. It's all plain to her."

"Do you really think that, father?"

"I know it, Dannie." And his tone was one of settled conviction.

Dan had already discovered that his father was deeply religious. It was a faith the like of which had not descended to his own day and generation.

"Well, I had it rather hard for a while," going back to his story.

"Yes," with keen sympathy. "You were nothing but a little boy."

"Finally, I was lucky enough to get a place as a newsboy on a train. I sold papers until I was sixteen, and then began braking. I wanted to be an

engineer, but I guess my ability lay in another direction. At any rate, they took me off the road and gave me an office position instead. I got to be a division superintendent, and then I met General Cornish. He is one of the directors of the line I was with at the time. Three months ago he made me an offer to take hold here, and so here I am."

"And you've never been back home, Dannie?"

"Never once. I've wanted to go, but I couldn't."

He hoped his father would understand.

"Well, there ain't much to take you there but her grave. I wish she might have lived, you'd have been a great happiness to her, and she got very little happiness for her portion any ways you look at it. We were only just married when the war came, and I was gone four years. Then there was about eleven years when we were getting on nicely. We had money put by, and owned our own home. Can you remember it, Dannie? The old brick place on the corner across from the post-office. A new Methodist church stands there now. It was sold to get money for my lawyer when the big trouble came. Afterwards, when everything was spent, she must have found it very hard to make a living for herself and you."

"She did," said Dan, gently. "But she managed somehow to keep a roof over our heads."

"When the law sets out to punish it don't stop with the guilty only. When I went to her grave and saw there were flowers growing on it, and that it was

being cared for, it told me what you were. She was a very brave woman, Dannie."

"Yes," pityingly, "she was."

"Few women have had the sorrow she had, and few women could have borne up under it as she did. You know that was an awful thing about Sharp."

He put up his hand and wiped the great drops of perspiration from his forehead.

Dan turned towards him quickly.

"Why do you speak of it? It's all past now."

"I'd sort of like to tell you about it."

There was a long pause, and he continued:

"Sharp and I had been enemies for a long time. It started back before the war, when he wanted to marry your mother. We both enlisted in the same regiment, and somehow the trouble kept alive. He was a bit of a bully, and I was counted a handy man with my fists, too. The regiment was always trying to get us into the ring together, but we knew it was dangerous. We had sense enough for that. I won't say he would have done it, but I never felt safe when there was a fight on in all those four years. It's easy enough to shoot the man in front of you and no one be the wiser. Many a score's been settled that way. When we got home again we didn't get along any better. He was a drinking man, and had no control over himself when liquor got the best of him. I did my share in keeping the feud alive. What he said of me and what I said of him generally reached both of us in time, as you can fancy.

"At last, when I joined the church, I concluded

it wasn't right to hate a man the way I hated Sharp, for, you see, he'd never really done anything to me.

"One day I stopped in at the smithy—he was a blacksmith—to have a talk with him and see if we couldn't patch it up somehow and be friends. It was a Saturday afternoon, and he'd been drinking more than was good for him.

"I hadn't hardly got the first words out when he came at me with a big sledge in his hand, all in a rage, and swearing he'd have my life. I pushed him off and started for the door. I saw it was no use to try to reason with him, but he came at me again, and this time he struck me with his sledge. It did no harm, though it hurt, and I pushed him out of my way and backed off towards the door. The lock was caught, and before I could open it, he was within striking distance again, and I had to turn to defend myself. I snatched up a bar of iron perhaps a foot long. I had kept my temper down until then, but the moment I had a weapon in my hand it got clean away from me, and in an instant I was fighting —just as he was fighting—to kill."

Roger Oakley had told the story of the murder in a hard, emotionless voice, but Dan saw in the half-light that his face was pale and drawn. Dan found it difficult to associate the thought of violence with the man at his side, whose whole manner spoke of an unusual restraint and control. That he had killed a man, even in self-defence, seemed preposterous and inconceivable.

There was a part of the story Roger Oakley could

not tell, and which his son had no desire to hear.

"People said afterwards that I'd gone there purposely to pick a quarrel with Sharp, and his helper, who, it seems, was in the yard back of the smithy setting a wagon tire, swore he saw me through a window as I entered, and that I struck the first blow. He may have seen only the end of it, and really believed I did begin it, but that's a sample of how things got twisted. Nobody believed my motive was what I said it was. The jury found me guilty of murder, and the judge gave me a life sentence. A good deal of a fuss was made over what I did at the fire last winter. Hart told me he'd sent you the papers."

Dan nodded, and his father continued:

"Some ladies who were interested in mission work at the prison took the matter up and got me my pardon. It's a fearful and a wicked thing for a man to lose his temper, Dannie. At first I was bitter against every one who had a hand in sending me to prison, but I've put that all from my heart. It was right I should be punished."

He rose from his chair, striking the ashes from his pipe.

"Ain't it very late, Dannie? I'll just put away my things, and then we can go to bed. I didn't mean to keep you up."

Oakley watched his precise and orderly arrangement of his few belongings. He could see that it was a part of the prison discipline under which he had lived for almost a quarter of a century. When

the contents of his bundle were disposed of to his satisfaction, he put on a pair of steel-rimmed spectacles, with large, round glasses, and took up a well-thumbed Bible, which he had placed at one side.

"I hope you haven't forgotten this book, Dannie," tapping it softly with a heavy forefinger.

CHAPTER VII

KERR and Holt were at Buckhorn Junction with the pay-car, a decrepit caboose that complained in every wheel as the engine jerked it over the rails. Holt said that its motion was good for Kerr's dyspepsia. He called it the pay-car cure, and professed to believe it a subtle manifestation of the general's benevolence.

Miss Walton was having a holiday. This left Oakley the sole tenant of the office.

He had returned from Chicago the day before, where he had gone to drum up work.

It was a hot, breathless morning in May. The machinery in the shops droned on and on, with the lazy, softened hum of revolving wheels, or the swish of swiftly passing belts. A freight was cutting out cars in the yards. It was rather noisy and bumped discordantly in and out of the sidings.

Beyond the tracks and a narrow field, where the young corn stood in fresh green rows, was a line of stately sycamores and vivid willows that bordered Billup's Fork. Tradition had it that an early settler by the name of Billup had been drowned there—a feat that must have required considerable ingenuity on his part, as the stream was nothing but a series of

shallow riffles, with an occasional deep hole. Once Jeffy, generously drunk, had attempted to end his life in the fork. He had waded in above his shoe-tops, only to decide that the water was too cold, and had waded out again, to the keen disappointment of six small boys on the bank, who would have been grateful for any little excitement. He said he wanted to live to invent a drink that tasted as good coming up as it did going down; there was all kinds of money in such a drink. But the boys felt they had been swindled, and threw stones at him. It is sometimes difficult to satisfy an audience. Nearer at hand, but invisible, Clarence was practising an elusive dance-step in an empty coal-car. He was inspired by a lofty ambition to equal—he dared not hope to excel—a gentleman he had seen at a recent minstrel performance.

McClintock, passing, had inquired sarcastically if it was his busy day, but Clarence had ignored the question. He felt that he had nothing in common with one who possessed such a slavish respect for mere industry.

Presently McClintock wandered in from the hot out-of-doors to talk over certain repairs he wished undertaken in the shops. He was a typical American mechanic, and Oakley liked him, as he always liked the man who knew his business and earned his pay.

They discussed the repairs, and then Oakley asked, "How's my father getting along, Milt?"

"Oh, all right. He's a little slow, that's all."

"What's he on now?"

"Those blue-line cars that came in last month."

"There isn't much in that batch. I had to figure close to get the work. Keep the men moving."

"They are about done. I'll put the painters on the job to-morrow."

"That's good."

McClintock went over to the water-cooler in the corner and filled a stemless tumbler with ice-water.

"We'll be ready to send them up to Buckhorn the last of next week. Is there anything else in sight?"

He gulped down the water at a single swallow.

"No, not at present, but there are one or two pretty fair orders coming in next month that I was lucky enough to pick up in Chicago. Isn't there any work of our own we can go at while things are slack?"

"Lots of it," wiping his hands on the legs of his greasy overalls. "All our day coaches need paint, and some want new upholstery."

"We'd better go at that, then."

"All right. I'll take a look at the cars in the yards, and see what I can put out in place of those we call in. There's no use talking, Mr. Oakley, you've done big things for the shops," he added.

"Well, I am getting some work for them, and while there isn't much profit in it, perhaps, it's a great deal better than being idle."

"Just a whole lot," agreed McClintock.

"I think I can pick up contracts enough to keep us busy through the summer. I understand you've always had to shut down."

"Yes, or half-time," disgustedly.

"I guess we can worry through without that; at any rate, I want to," observed Oakley.

"I'll go see how I can manage about our own repairs," said McClintock.

He went out, and from the window Oakley saw him with a bunch of keys in his hand going in the direction of a line of battered day coaches on one of the sidings. The door opened again almost immediately to admit Griff Ryder. This was almost the last person in Antioch from whom Dan was expecting a call. The editor's cordiality as he greeted him made him instantly suspect that some favor was wanted. Most people who came to the office wanted favors. Usually it was either a pass or a concession on freight.

As a rule, Kerr met all such applicants. His manner fitted him for just such interviews, and he had no gift for popularity, which suffered in consequence.

Ryder pushed a chair over beside Oakley's and seated himself. By sliding well down on his spine he managed to reach the low sill of the window with his feet. He seemed to admire the effect, for he studied them in silence for a moment.

"There's a little matter I want to speak to you about, Oakley. I've been intending to run in for the past week, but I have been so busy I couldn't."

Oakley nodded for him to go on.

"In the first place, I'd like to feel that you were for Kenyon. You can be of a great deal of use to us

this election. It's going to be close, and Kenyon's a pretty decent sort of a chap to have come out of these parts. You ought to take an interest in seeing him re-elected."

Oakley surmised that this was the merest flattery intended to tickle his vanity. He answered promptly that he didn't feel the slightest interest in politics one way or the other.

"Well, but one good fellow ought to wish to see another good fellow get what he's after, and you can help us if you've a mind to; but this isn't what I've come for. It's about Hoadley."

"What about Hoadley?" quickly.

"He's got the idea that his days with the Huckleberry are about numbered."

"I haven't said so."

"I know you haven't."

"Then what is he kicking about? When he's to go, he'll hear of it from me."

"But, just the same, it's in the air that there's to be a shake-up, and that a number of men, and Hoadly among them, are going to be laid off. Now, he's another good fellow, and he's a friend of mine, and I told him I'd come in and fix it up with you."

"I don't think you can fix it up with me, Mr. Ryder. Just the same, I'd like to know how this got out."

"Then there is to be a shake-up?"

Oakley bit his lips. "You seem to take it for granted there is to be."

"I guess there's something back of the rumor."

"I may as well tell you why Hoadley's got to go."

"Oh, he is to go, then? I thought my information was correct."

"In the first place, he's not needed, and in the second place, he's a lazy loafer. The road must earn its keep. General Cornish is sick of putting his hand in his pocket every six months to keep it out of bankruptcy. You are enough of a business man to know he won't stand that sort of thing forever. Of course I am sorry for Hoadley if he needs the money, but some one's got to suffer, and he happens to be the one. I'll take on his work myself. I can do it, and that's a salary saved. I haven't any personal feeling in the matter. The fact that I don't like him, as it happens, has nothing to do with it. If he were my own brother he'd have to get out."

"I can't see that one man, more or less, is going to make such a hell of a difference, Oakley," Ryder urged, with what he intended should be an air of frank good-fellowship.

"Can't you?" with chilly dignity. Oakley was slow to anger, but he had always fought stubbornly for what he felt was due him, and he wished the editor to understand that the management of the B. & A. was distinctly not his province.

Ryder's eyes were half closed, and only a narrow slit of color showed between the lids.

"I am very much afraid we won't hit it off. I begin to see we aren't going to get on. I want you to keep Hoadley as a personal favor to me. Just wait until I finish. If you are going in for reform, I may

have it in my power to be of some service to you. You will need some backing here, and even a country newspaper can manufacture public sentiment. Now if we aren't to be friends you will find me on the other side, and working just as hard against you as I am willing to work for you if you let Hoadley stay."

Oakley jumped up.

"I don't allow anybody to talk like that to me. I am running this for Cornish. They are his interests, not mine, and you can start in and manufacture all the public sentiment you damn please." Then he cooled down a bit and felt ashamed of himself for the outburst.

"I am not going to be unfair to any one if I can help it. But if the road's earnings don't meet the operating expenses the general will sell it to the M. & W. Do you understand what that means? It will knock Antioch higher than a kite, for the shops will be closed. I guess when all hands get that through their heads they will take it easier."

"That's just the point I made. Who is going to enlighten them if it isn't me? I don't suppose you will care to go around telling everybody what a fine fellow you are, and how thankful they should be that you have stopped their wages. We can work double, Oakley. I want Hoadley kept because he's promised me his influence for Kenyon if I'd exert myself in his behalf. He's of importance up at the Junction. Of course we know he's a drunken beast, but that's got nothing to do with it."

"I am sorry, but he's got to go," said Oakley,

doggedly. "A one-horse railroad can't carry dead timber."

"Very well." And Ryder pulled in his legs and rose slowly from his chair. "If you can't and won't see it as I do it's your lookout."

Oakley laughed, shortly.

"I guess I'll be able to meet the situation, Mr. Ryder."

"Perhaps you will, and perhaps you won't. We'll see about that when the time comes."

"You heard what I said about the M. & W.?"

"Well, what about that?"

"You understand what it means—the closing of the shops?"

"Oh, I guess that's a long ways off."

He stalked over to the door with his head in the air. He was mad clear through. At the door he turned. Hoadley's retention meant more to him than he would have admitted. It was not that he cared a rap for Hoadley. On the contrary, he detested him, but the fellow was a power in country politics.

"If you should think better of it—" and he was conscious his manner was weak with the weakness of the man who has asked and failed.

"I sha'n't," retorted Oakley, laconically.

He scouted the idea that Ryder, with his little country newspaper could either help or harm him.

CHAPTER VIII

ROGER OAKLEY had gone to work in the car-shops the day following his arrival in Antioch.

Dan had sought to dissuade him, but he was stubbornness itself, and the latter realized that the only thing to do was to let him alone, and not seek to control him.

After all, if he would be happier at work, it was no one's affair but his own.

It never occurred to the old convict that pride might have to do with the stand Dan took in the matter.

He was wonderfully gentle and affectionate, with a quaint, unworldly simplicity that was rather pathetic. His one anxiety was to please Dan, but, in spite of this anxiety, once a conviction took possession of him he clung to it with unshaken tenacity in the face of every argument his son could bring to bear.

Under the inspiration of his newly acquired freedom, he developed in unexpected ways. As soon as he felt that his place in the shops was secure and that he was not to be interfered with, he joined the Methodist Church. Its services occupied most of his spare time. Every Thursday night found him at prayer-meeting. Twice each Sunday he went to

church, and by missing his dinner he managed to take part in the Sunday-school exercises. A social threw him into a flutter of pleased expectancy. Not content with what his church offered, irrespective of creed, he joined every society in the place of a religious or temperance nature, and was a zealous and active worker among such of the heathen as flourished in Antioch. There was a stern Old Testament flavor to his faith. He would have dragged the erring from their peril by main strength, and have regulated their morals by legal enactments. Those of the men with whom he came in contact in the shops treated him with the utmost respect, partly on his own account, and partly because of Dan.

McClintock always addressed him as "The Deacon," and soon ceased to overflow with cheerful profanity in his presence. The old man had early taken occasion to point out to him the error of his ways and to hint at what was probably in store for him unless he curbed the utterances of his tongue. He was not the only professing Christian in the car-shops, but he was the only one who had ventured to "call down" the master-mechanic.

Half of all he earned he gave to the church. The remainder of his slender income he divided again into two equal parts. One of these he used for his personal needs, the other disappeared mysteriously. He was putting it by for "Dannie."

It was a disappointment to him that his son took only the most casual interest in religious matters. He comforted himself, however, with the remem-

brance that at his age his own interest had been merely traditional. It was only after his great trouble that the awakening came. He was quite certain "Dannie" would experience this awakening, too, some day.

Finally he undertook the regeneration of Jeffy. Every new-comer in Antioch of a philanthropic turn of mind was sure sooner or later to fall foul of the outcast, who was usually willing to drop whatever he was doing to be reformed. It pleased him and interested him.

He was firmly grounded in the belief, however, that in his case the reformation that would really reform would have to be applied externally, and without inconvenience to himself, but until the spiritual genius turned up who could work this miracle, he was perfectly willing to be experimented upon by any one who had a taste for what he called good works.

After Mrs. Bentick's funeral he had found the means, derived in part from the sale of Turner Joyce's wardrobe, to go on a highly sensational drunk, which comprehended what was known in Antioch as "The Snakes."

Roger Oakley had unearthed him at the gas-house, a melancholy, tattered ruin. He had rented a room for his occupancy, and had conveyed him thither under cover of the night. During the week that followed, while Jeffy was convalescent, he spent his evenings there reading to him from the Bible.

Jeffy would have been glad to escape these at-

tentions. This new moral force in the community inspired an emotion akin to awe. Day by day, as he recognized the full weight of authority in Roger Oakley's manner towards him, this awe increased, until at last it developed into an acute fear. So he kept his bed and meditated flight. He even considered going as far away as Buckhorn or Harrison to be rid of the old man. Then, by degrees, he felt himself weaken and succumb to the other's control. His cherished freedom—the freedom of the woods and fields, and the drunken spree variously attained, seemed only a happy memory. But the last straw was put upon him, and he rebelled when his benefactor announced that he was going to find work for him.

At first Jeffy had preferred not to take this seriously. He assumed to regard it as a delicate sarcasm on the part of his new friend. He closed first one watery eye and then the other. It was such a good joke. But Roger Oakley only reiterated his intention with unmistakable seriousness. It was no joke, and the outcast promptly sat up in bed, while a look of slow horror overspread his face.

"But I ain't never worked, Mr. Oakley," he whined, hoarsely. "I don't feel no call to work. The fact is, I am too busy to work. I would be wasting my time if I done that. I'd be durn thankful if you could reform me, but I'll tell you right now this ain't no way to begin. No, sir, you couldn't make a worse start."

"It's high time you went at something," said his self-appointed guide and monitor, with stony con-

viction, and he backed his opinion with a quotation from the Scriptures.

Now to Jeffy, who had been prayerfully brought up by a pious mother, the Scriptures were the fountain-head of all earthly wisdom. To invoke a citation from the Bible was on a par with calling in the town marshal. It closed the incident so far as argument was concerned. He was vaguely aware that there was one text which he had heard which seemed to give him authority to loaf, but he couldn't remember it.

Roger Oakley looked at him rather sternly over the tops of his steel-rimmed spectacles, and said, with quiet determination, "I am going to make a man of you. You've got it in you. There's hope in every human life. You must let drink alone, and you must work. Work's what you need."

"No, it ain't. I never done a day's work in my life. It'd kill me if I had to get out and hustle and sweat and bile in the sun. Durnation! of all fool ideas! I never seen the beat!" He threw himself back on the bed, stiff and rigid, and covered his face with the sheet.

For perhaps a minute he lay perfectly still. Then the covers were seen to heave tumultuously, while short gasps and sobs were distinctly audible. Presently two skinny but expressive legs habited in red flannel were thrust from under the covers and kicked violently back and forth.

A firm hand plucked the sheet from before the out-

cast's face, and the gaunt form of the old convict bent grimly above him.

"Come, come, Jeffy, I didn't expect this of you. I am willing to help you in every way I can. I'll get my son to make a place for you at the shops. How will you like that?"

"How'll I like it? You ought to know me well enough to know I won't like it a little bit!" in tearful and indignant protest. "You just reach me them pants of mine off the back of that chair. You mean well, I'll say that much for you, but you got the sweatiest sort of a religion; durned if it ain't all work! Just reach me them pants, do now," and he half rose up in his bed, only to encounter a strong arm that pushed him back on the pillows.

"You can't have your pants, Jeffy, not now. You must stay here until you get well and strong."

"How am I going to get well and strong with you hounding me to death? I never seen such a man to take up with an idea and stick to it against all reason. It just seems as if you'd set to work to break my spirit," plaintively.

Roger Oakley frowned at him in silence for a moment, then he said:

"I thought we'd talked all this over, Jeffy."

"I just wanted to encourage you. I was mighty thankful to have you take hold. I hadn't been reformed for over a year. It about seemed to me that everybody had forgotten I needed to be reformed, and I was willing to give you a chance. No one can't ever say I ain't stood ready to do that much."

"But, my poor Jeffy, you will have to do more than that."

"Blamed if it don't seem to me as if you was expecting me to do it all!"

The old convict drew up a chair to the bedside and sat down.

"I thought you told me you wanted to be a man and to be respected?" said this philanthropist, with evident displeasure.

Jeffy choked down a sob and sat up again. He gestured freely with his arms in expostulation.

"I was drunk when I said that. Yes, sir, I was as full as I could stick. Now I'm sober, I know rotten well what I want."

"What do you want, Jeffy?"

"Well, I want a lot of things."

"Well, what, for instance?"

"Well, sir, it ain't no prayers, and it ain't no Bible talks, and it ain't no lousy work. It's coming warm weather. I want to lay up along the crick-bank in the sun and do nothing—what I always done. I've had a durned hard winter, and I been a-living for the spring."

A look of the keenest disappointment clouded Roger Oakley's face as Jeffy voiced his ignoble ambitions. His resentment gave way to sorrow. He murmured a prayer that he might be granted strength and patience for his task, and as he prayed with half-closed eyes, the outcast plugged his ears with his fingers. He was a firm believer in the efficacy of prayer, and he felt he couldn't afford to take any chances.

Roger Oakley turned to him with greater gentleness of manner than he had yet shown.

"Don't you want the love and confidence of your neighbors, Jeffy?" he asked, pityingly.

"I ain't got no neighbors, except the bums who sleep along of me at the gas-house winter nights. I always feel this way when I come off a spree; first it seems as if I'd be willing never to touch another drop of licker as long as I lived. I just lose interest in everything, and I don't care a durn what happens to me. Why, I've joined the Church lots of times when I felt that way, but as soon as I begin to get well it's different. I am getting well now, and what I told you don't count any more. I got my own way of living."

"But what a way!" sadly.

"Maybe it ain't your way, and maybe it ain't the best way, but it suits me bully. I can always get enough to eat by going and asking some one for it, and you can't beat that. No, sir. You know durn well you can't!" becoming argumentative. "It just makes me sick to think of paying for things like vittles and clothes. A feller's got to have clothes, anyhow, ain't he? You know mighty well he has, or he'll get pinched, and supposing I was to earn a lot of money, even as much as a dollar a day, I'd have to spend every blamed cent to live. One day I'd work, and then the next I'd swaller what I'd worked for. Where's the sense in that? And I'd have all sorts of ornery worries for fear I'd lose my job." A look of wistful yearning overspread his

face. "Just you give me the hot days that's coming, when a feller's warm clean through and sweats in the shade, and I won't ask for no money. You can have it all!"

That night, when he left him, Roger Oakley carefully locked the door and pocketed the key, and the helpless wretch on the bed, despairing and miserable, and cut off from all earthly hope, turned his face to the white wall and sobbed aloud.

CHAPTER IX

THEY were standing on the street corner before the hotel. Oakley had just come up-town from the office. He was full of awkward excuses and apologies, but Dr. Emory cut them short.

"I suppose I've a right to be angry at the way you've avoided us, but I'm not. On the contrary, I'm going to take you home to dinner with me."

If Dan had consulted his preferences in the matter, he would have begged off, but he felt he couldn't, without giving offence; so he allowed the doctor to lead him away, but he didn't appear as pleased or as grateful as he should have been at this temporary release from the low diet of the American House.

Miss Emory was waiting for her father on the porch. An errand of hers had taken him down-town.

She seemed surprised to see Oakley, but graciously disposed towards him. While he fell short of her standards, he was decidedly superior to the local youth with whom she had at first been inclined to class him. Truth to tell, the local youth fought rather shy of the doctor's beautiful daughter. Mr. Burt Smith, the gentlemanly druggist and acknowledged social leader, who was much sought after by

the most exclusive circles in such centres of fashion as Buckhorn and Harrison, had been so chilled by her manner when, meeting her on the street, he had attempted to revive an acquaintance which dated back to their childhood, that he was a mental wreck for days afterwards, and had hardly dared trust himself to fill even the simplest prescription.

When the Monday Club and the Social Science Club and the History Club hinted that she might garner great sheaves of culture and enlightenment at their meetings, Constance merely smiled condescendingly, but held aloof, and the ladies of Antioch were intellectual without her abetment. They silently agreed with the Emorys' free-born help, who had seen better days, that she was "haughty proud" and "stuck up."

Many was the informal indignation meeting they held, and many the vituperate discussion handed down concerning Miss Emory, but Miss Emory went her way with her head held high, apparently serenely unconscious of her offence against the peace and quiet of the community.

It must not be supposed that she was intentionally unkind or arrogant. It was unfortunate, perhaps, but she didn't like the townspeople. She would have been perfectly willing to admit they were quite as good as she. The whole trouble was that they were different, and the merits of this difference had nothing to do with the case. Her stand in the matter shocked her mother and amused her father.

Dr. Emory excused himself and went into the

house. Dan made himself comfortable on the steps at Miss Emory's side. In the very nearness there was something luxurious and satisfying. He was silent because he feared the antagonism of speech.

The rest of Antioch had eaten its supper, principally in its shirt-sleeves, and was gossiping over front gates, or lounging on front steps. When Antioch loafed it did so with great singleness of purpose.

Here and there through the town, back yards had been freshly ploughed for gardens. In some of these men and boys were burning last year's brush and litter. The smoke hung heavy and undispersed in the twilight. Already the younger hands from the car-shops had "cleaned up," and, dressed in their best clothes, were hurrying back down-town to hang about the square and street corners until it was time to return home and go to bed.

Off in the distance an occasional shrill whistle told where the ubiquitous small boy was calling a comrade out to play, and every now and then, with a stealthy patter of bare feet, some coatless urchin would scurry past the Emorys' gate.

It was calm and restful, but it gave one a feeling of loneliness, too; Antioch seemed very remote from the great world where things happened, or were done. In spite of his satisfaction, Dan vaguely realized this. To the girl at his side, however, the situation was absolutely tragic. The life she had known had been so different, but it had been purchased at the expense of a good deal of inconvenience

and denial on the part of her father and mother. It was impossible to ask a continuance of the sacrifice, and it was equally impossible to remain in Antioch. She did not want to be selfish, but the day was not far off when it would resolve itself into a question of simple self-preservation. She had not yet reached the point where she could consider marriage as a possible means of escape, and, even if she had, it would not have solved the problem, for whom was she to marry?

There was a tired, fretful look in her eyes. She had lost something of her brilliancy and freshness. In her despair she told herself she was losing everything.

"I was with friends of yours this afternoon, Mr. Oakley," she said, by way of starting the conversation.

"Friends of mine, here?"

"Yes. The Joyces."

"I must go around and see them. They have been very kind to my father," said Dan, with hearty good-will.

"How long is your father to remain in Antioch, Mr. Oakley?" inquired Constance.

"As long as I remain, I suppose. There are only the two of us, you know."

"What does he find to do here?"

"Oh," laughed Dan, "he finds plenty to do. His energy is something dreadful. Then, too, he's employed at the shops; that keeps him pretty busy, you see."

But Miss Emory hadn't known this before. She elevated her eyebrows in mild surprise. She was not sure she understood.

"I didn't know that he was one of the officers of the road," with deceptive indifference.

"He's not. He's a cabinet-maker," explained the literal Oakley, to whom a cabinet-maker was quite as respectable as any one else. There was a brief pause, while Constance turned this over in her mind. It struck her as very singular that Oakley's father should be one of the hands. Perhaps she credited him with a sensitiveness of which he was entirely innocent.

She rested her chin in her hands and gazed out into the dusty street.

"Isn't it infinitely pathetic to think of that poor little man and his work?" going back to Joyce. "Do you know, I could have cried? And his wife's faith, it is sublime, even if it is mistaken." She laughed in a dreary fashion. "What is to be done for people like that, whose lives are quite uncompensated?"

To Oakley this opened up a field for future speculation, but he approved of her interest in Joyce. It was kindly and sincere, and it was unexpected. He had been inclined to view her as a proud young person, unduly impressed with the idea of her own beauty and superiority. It pleased him to think he had been mistaken.

They were joined by the doctor, who had caught a part of what Constance said, and divined the rest.

"You see only the pathos. Joyce is just as well off here as he would be anywhere else, and perhaps a little better. He makes a decent living with his pictures." As he spoke he crossed the porch and stood at her side, with his hand resting affectionately on her shoulder.

"I guess there's a larger justice in the world than we conceive," said Oakley.

"But not to know, to go on blindly doing something that is really very dreadful, and never to know! '

She turned to Oakley.

"I am afraid I rather agree with your father. He seems happy enough, and he is doing work for which there is a demand."

"Would you be content to live here with no greater opportunity than he has?"

Oakley laughed and shook his head.

"No. But that's not the same. I'll pull the Huckleberry up and make it pay, and then go in for something bigger."

"And if you can't make it pay?"

"I won't bother with it, then."

"But if you had to remain?"

Oakley gave her an incredulous smile.

"That couldn't be possible. I have done all sorts of things but stick in what I found to be undesirable berths; but, of course, business is not at all the same."

"But isn't it? Look at Mr. Ryder. He says that he is buried here in the pine-woods, with no hope of ever getting back into the world, and I am sure

he is able, and journalism is certainly a business, like anything else."

Oakley made no response to this. He didn't propose to criticise Ryder, but, all the same, he doubted his ability.

"Griff's frightfully lazy," remarked the doctor. "He prefers to settle down to an effortless sort of an existence rather than make a struggle."

"Don't you think Mr. Ryder extremely clever, Mr. Oakley?"

"I know him so slightly, Miss Emory; but no doubt he is."

Mrs. Emory appeared in the doorway, placid and smiling.

"Constance, you and Mr. Oakley come on in; dinner's ready."

When Dan went home that night he told himself savagely that he would never go to the Emorys' again. The experience had been most unsatisfactory. In spite of Constance's evident disposition towards tolerance where he was concerned, she exasperated him. Her unconscious condescension was a bitter memory of which he could not rid himself. Certainly women must be petty, small-souled creatures if she was at all representative of her sex. Yet, in spite of his determination to avoid Constance, even at the risk of seeming rude, he found it required greater strength of will than he possessed to keep away from the Emorys.

He realized, in the course of the next few weeks, that a new stage in his development had been reach-

ed. Inspired by what he felt was a false but beautiful confidence in himself, he called often, and, as time wore on, the frequency of these calls steadily increased. All this while he thought about Miss Emory a great deal, and was sorry for her or admired her, according to his mood.

In Constance's attitude towards him there was a certain fickleness that he resented. Sometimes she was friendly and companionable, and then again she seemed to revive all her lingering prejudices and was utterly indifferent to him, and her indifference was the most complete thing of its kind he had ever encountered.

Naturally Dan and Ryder met very frequently, and when they met they clashed. It was not especially pleasant, of course, but Ryder was persistent and Oakley was dogged. Once he started in pursuit of an object, he never gave up or owned that he was beaten. In some form he had accomplished everything he set out to do; and if the results had not always been just what he had anticipated, he had at least had the satisfaction of bringing circumstances under his control. He endured the editor's sarcasms, and occasionally retaliated with a vengeance so heavy as to leave Griff quivering with the smart of it.

Miss Emory found it difficult to maintain the peace between them, but she admired Dan's mode of warfare. It was so conclusive, and he showed such grim strength in his ability to look out for himself.

But Dan felt that he must suffer by any comparison with the editor. He had no genius for trifles,

but rather a ponderous capacity. He had worked hard, with the single determination to win success. He had the practical man's contempt, born of his satisfied ignorance for all useless things, and to his mind the useless things were those whose value it was impossible to reckon in dollars and cents.

He had been well content with himself, and now he felt that somehow he had lost his bearings. Why was it he had not known before that the mere strenuous climb, the mere earning of a salary, was not all of life? He even felt a sneaking envy of Ryder of which he was heartily ashamed.

Men fall in love differently. Some resist and hang back from the inevitable, not being sure of themselves, and some go headlong, never having any doubts. With characteristic singleness of purpose, Dan went headlong; but of course he did not know what the trouble was until long after the facts in the case were patent to every one, and Antioch had lost interest in its speculations as to whether the doctor's daughter would take the editor or the general manager, for, as Mrs. Poppleton, the Emorys' nearest neighbor, sagely observed, she was "having her pick."

To Oakley Miss Emory seemed to accumulate dignity and reserve in the exact proportion that he lost them, but he was determined she should like him if she never did more than that.

She was just the least bit afraid of him. She knew he was not deficient in a proper pride, and that

he possessed plenty of self-respect, but for all that he was not very dexterous. It amused her to lead him on, and then to draw back and leave him to flounder out of some untenable position she had beguiled him into assuming.

She displayed undeniable skill in these manœuvres, and Dan was by turns savage and penitent. But she never gave him a chance to say what he wanted to say.

Ryder made his appeal to her vanity. It was a strong appeal. He was essentially presentable and companionable. She understood him, and they had much in common, but for all that her heart approved of Oakley. She felt his dominance; she realized that he was direct and simple and strong. Yet in her judgment of him she was not very generous. She could not understand, for instance, how it was that he had been willing to allow his father to go to work in the shops like one of the common hands. It seemed to her to argue such an awful poverty in the way of ideals.

The old convict was another stumbling-block. She had met him at the Joyces', and had been quick to recognize that he and Dan were very much alike —the difference was merely that of age and youth. Indeed, the similarity was little short of painful. There was the same simplicity, the same dogged stubbornness, and the same devotion to what she conceived to be an almost brutal sense of duty. In the case of the father this idea of duty had crystallized in a strangely literal belief in the Deity and ex-

pressed itself with rampant boastfulness at the very discomforts of a faith which, like the worship of Juggernaut, demanded untold sacrifices and apparently gave nothing in return.

She tried to stifle her growing liking for Oakley and her unwilling admiration for his strength and honesty and a certain native refinement. Unconsciously, perhaps, she had always associated qualities of this sort with position and wealth. She divined his lack of early opportunity, and was alive to his many crudities of speech and manner, and he suffered, as he knew he must suffer, by comparison with the editor; but, in spite of this, Constance Emory knew deep down in her heart that he possessed solid and substantial merits of his own.

CHAPTER X

KENYON came to town to remind his Antioch friends and supporters that presently he would be needing their votes.

He was Ryder's guest for a week, and the *Herald* recorded his movements with painstaking accuracy and with what its editor secretly considered metropolitan enterprise. The great man had his official headquarters at the *Herald* office, a ramshackle two-story building on the west side of the square. Here he was at home to the local politicians, and to such of the general public as wished to meet him. The former smoked his cigars and talked incessantly of primaries, nominations, and majorities — topics on which they appeared to be profoundly versed. Their distinguishing mark was their capacity for strong drink, which was far in excess of that of the ordinary citizen who took only a casual interest in politics. The *Herald's* back door opened into an alley, and was directly opposite that of the Red Star saloon. At stated intervals Mr. Kenyon and Mr. Ryder, followed by the faithful, trailed through this back door and across the alley, where they cheerfully exposed themselves to such of the gilded allurements of vice as the Red Star had to offer.

The men of Antioch eschewed front doors as giving undue publicity to the state of their thirst, a point on which they must have been very sensitive, for though a number of saloons flourished in the town, only a few of the most reckless and emancipated spirits were ever seen to enter them.

Kenyon was a sloppily dressed man of forty-five or thereabouts, who preserved an air of rustic shrewdness. He was angular-faced and smooth-shaven, and wore his hair rather long in a tangled mop. He was generally described in the party papers as "The Picturesque Statesman from Old Hanover." He had served one term in Congress; prior to that, by way of apprenticeship, he had done a great deal of hard work and dirty work for his party. His fortunes had been built on the fortunes of a bigger and an abler man, who, after a fight which was already famous in the history of the State for its bitterness, had been elected Governor, and Kenyon, having picked the winner, had gone to his reward. Just now he had a shrewd idea that the Governor was anxious to unload him, and that the party leaders were sharpening their knives for him. Their change of heart grew out of the fact that he had "dared to assert his independence," as he said, and had "played the sneak and broken his promises," as they said, in a little transaction which had been left to him to put through.

Personally Ryder counted him an unmitigated scamp, but the man's breezy vulgarity, his nerve, and his infinite capacity to jolly tickled his fancy.

He had so far freed himself of his habitual indifference that he was displaying an unheard-of energy in promoting Kenyon's interest. Of course he expected to derive certain very substantial benefits from the alliance. The Congressman had made him endless promises, and Ryder saw, or thought he saw, his way clear to leave Antioch in the near future. For two days he had been saying, "Mr. Brown, shake hands with Congressman Kenyon," or, "Mr. Jones, I want you to know Congressman Kenyon, the man we must keep at Washington."

He had marvelled at the speed with which the statesman got down to first names. He had also shown a positive instinct as to whom he should invite to make the trip across the alley to the Red Star, and whom not. Mr. Kenyon said, modestly, when Griff commented on this, that his methods were modern—they were certainly vulgar.

"I guess I'm going to give 'em a run for their money, Ryder. I can see I'm doing good work here. There's nothing like being on the ground yourself."

It was characteristic of him that he should ignore the work Ryder had done in his behalf.

"You are an inspiration, Sam. The people know their leader," said the editor, genially, but with a touch of sarcasm that was lost on Kenyon, who took himself quite seriously.

"Yes, sir, they'd 'a' done me dirt," feelingly, "but I am on my own range now, and ready to pull off my coat and fight for what's due me."

They were seated before the open door which looked out upon the square. Kenyon was chewing nervously at the end of an unlit cigar, which he held between his fingers. "When the nomination is made I guess the other fellow will discover I 'ain't been letting the grass grow in my path." He spat out over the door-sill into the street. "What's that you were just telling me about the Huckleberry?"

"This new manager of Cornish's is going to make the road pay, and he's going to do it from the pockets of the employés," said Ryder, with a disgruntled air, for the memory of his interview with Dan still rankled.

"That ain't bad, either. You know the Governor's pretty close to Cornish. The general was a big contributor to his campaign fund."

Ryder hitched his chair nearer his companion's.

"If there's a cut in wages at the shops—and I suppose that will be the next move—there's bound to be a lot of bad feeling."

" Well, don't forget we are for the people," remarked the Congressman, and he winked slyly.

Ryder smiled cynically.

"I sha'n't. I have it in for the manager, anyhow."

"What's wrong with him?"

"Oh, nothing, but a whole lot," answered Griff, with apparent indifference.

At this juncture Dr. Emory crossed the square from the post-office and paused in front of the *Herald* building.

"How's Dr. Emory?" said Kenyon, by way of greeting.

Ryder had risen.

"Won't you come in and sit down, doctor?" he inquired.

"No, no. Keep your seat, Griff. I merely strolled over to say how d'ye do?"

Kenyon shot past the doctor a discolored stream. That gentleman moved uneasily to one side.

"Don't move," said the statesman, affably. "Plenty of room between you and the casing."

He left his chair and stood facing the doctor, and unpleasantly close. "Say, our young friend here's turned what I intended to be a vacation into a very busy time. He's got me down for speeches and all sorts of things, and it will be a wonder if I go home to Hanover sober. I won't if he can help it, that's dead sure. Won't you come in and have something?—just a little appetizer before supper?"

"No, I thank you."

"A cigar, then?" fumbling in his vest-pocket with fingers that were just the least bit unsteady.

"No, I must hurry along."

"We hope to get up again before Mr. Kenyon leaves town," said Ryder, wishing to head the statesman off. He was all right with such men as Cap Roberts and the Hon. Jeb Burrows, but he had failed signally to take the doctor's measure. The latter turned away.

"I hope you will, Griff," he said, kindly, his voice

dwelling with the least perceptible insistence on the last pronoun.

"Remember me to the wife and daughter," called out Kenyon, as the physician moved up the street with an unusual alacrity.

It was late in the afternoon, and the men from the car-shops were beginning to straggle past, going in the direction of their various homes. Presently Roger Oakley strode heavily by, with his tin dinner-pail on his arm. Otherwise there was nothing, either in his dress or appearance, to indicate that he was one of the hands. As he still lived at the hotel with Dan, he felt it necessary to exercise a certain care in the matter of dress. As he came into view the Congressman swept him with a casual scrutiny; then, as the old man plodded on up the street with deliberate step, Kenyon rose from his chair and stood in the doorway gazing after him.

"What's the matter, Sam?" asked Ryder, struck by his friend's manner.

"Who was that old man who just went past?"

"That? Oh, that's the manager's father. Why?"

"Well, he looks most awfully like some one else, that's all," and he appeared to lose interest.

"No, he's old man Oakley. He works in the shops."

"Oakley?"

"Yes, that's his name. Why?" curiously.

"How long has he been here, anyhow?"

"A month perhaps, maybe longer. Do you know him?"

"I've seen him before. A cousin of mine, John

Kenyon, is warden of a prison back in Massachusetts. It runs in the blood to hold office. I visited him last winter, and while I was there a fire broke out in the hospital ward, and that old man had a hand in saving the lives of two or three of the patients. The beggars came within an ace of losing their lives. I saw afterwards by the papers that the Governor had pardoned him."

Ryder jumped up with sudden alacrity.

"Do you remember the convict's full name?"

Kenyon meditated a moment; then he said:

"Roger Oakley."

The editor turned to the files of the *Herald*.

"I'll just look back and see if it's the same name. I've probably got it here among the personals, if I can only find it. What was he imprisoned for?" he added.

"He was serving a life sentence for murder, I think, John told me, but I won't be sure."

"The devil, you say!" ejaculated Ryder. "Yes, Roger Oakley, the name's the same."

"I knew I couldn't be mistaken. I got a pretty good memory for names and faces. Curious, ain't it, that he should turn up here?"

Ryder smiled queerly as he dropped the *Herald* files back into the rack.

"His son is manager for Cornish here. He's the fellow I was telling you about."

Kenyon smiled, too.

"I guess you won't have any more trouble with him. You've got him where you can hit him, and hit him hard whenever you like."

CHAPTER XI

ROGER OAKLEY carried out his threat to find work for Jeffy. As soon as the outcast was able to leave his bed, he took him down to the car-shops, which were destined to be the scene of this brief but interesting industrial experiment.

It was early morning, and they found only Clarence there. He was sweeping out the office—a labor he should have performed the night before, but, unless he was forcibly detained, he much preferred to let it go over, on the principle that everything that is put off till the morrow is just so much of a gain, and, in the end, tends to reduce the total of human effort, as some task must necessarily be left undone.

As Roger Oakley pushed open the door and entered the office in search of his son, his charge, who slunk and shuffled after him with legs which bore him but uncertainly, cast a long and lingering look back upon the freedom he was leaving. The dignity of labor, on which his patron had been expatiating as they walked in the shortening shadows under the maples, seemed a scanty recompense for all he was losing. A deep, wistful sigh escaped his lips. He turned his back on the out-of-doors and peered over

the old man's shoulder at Clarence with bleary eyes. Of course, he knew Clarence. This was a privilege not denied the humblest. Occasionally the urchin called him names, more often he pelted him with stones. The opportunities for excitement were limited in Antioch, and the juvenile population heedfully made the most of those which existed.

Jeffy was a recognized source of excitement. It was not as if one stole fruit or ran away from school. Then there was some one to object, and consequences; but if one had fun with Jeffy there was none to object but Jeffy, and, of course, he didn't count.

"Is my son here, Clarence?" asked Roger Oakley.

"Nope. The whistle ain't blowed yet. I am trying to get the place cleaned up before he comes down," making slaps at the desks and chairs with a large wet cloth. "What you going to do with him, Mr. Oakley?"

He nodded towards Jeffy, who seemed awed by the unaccustomedness of his surroundings, for he kept himself hidden back of the old man, his battered and brimless straw hat held nervously in his trembling fingers.

"I am going to get work for him."

"Him work! Him! Why, he don't want no work, Mr. Oakley. He's too strong to work." And Clarence went off into gales of merriment at the mere idea.

For an instant Jeffy gazed in silence at the boy with quickly mounting wrath, then he said, in a hoarse *tremolo:*

"You durned little loafer! Don't you give me none of your lip!"

Clarence had sufficiently subsided to remark, casually: "The old man 'd like to know what you got for that horse-blanket and whip you stole from our barn. You're a bird, you are! When he was willing to let you sleep in the barn because he was sorry for you!"

"You lie, durn you!" fiercely. "I didn't steal no whip or horse-blanket!"

"Yes, you did, too! The old man found out who you sold 'em to," smiling with exasperating coolness.

The outcast turned to Roger Oakley. "Nobody's willing to let by-gones be by-gones," and two large tears slid from his moist eyes. Then his manner changed abruptly. He became defiant, and, steping from behind his protector, shook a long and very dirty forefinger in Clarence's face.

"You just tell Chris Berry this from me—I'm done with him. I don't like no sneaks, and you just tell him this—he sha'n't never bury me."

"I reckon he ain't sweatin' to bury any paupers," hastily interjected the grinning Clarence. "The old man ain't in the business for his health."

"And if he don't stop slandering me"—his voice shot up out of its huskiness—"if he don't stop slandering me, I'll fix him!" He turned again to Roger Oakley. "Them Berrys is a low-lived lot! I hope you won't never have doings with 'em. They'll smile in your face and then do you dirt behind your

back; I've done a lot for Chris Berry, but I'm durned if I ever lift my hand for him again."

Perhaps he was too excited to specify the exact nature of the benefits which he had conferred upon the undertaker. Clarence ignored the attack upon his family. He contented himself with remarking, judiciously:

"Anybody who can slander you 's got a future ahead of him. He's got unusual gifts."

Here Roger Oakley saw fit to interfere in behalf of his protégé. He shook his head in grave admonition at the grinning youngster. "Jeffy is going to make a man of himself. It's not right to remember these things against him."

"They know rotten well that's what I'm always telling 'em. Let by-gones be by-gones—that's my motto—but they are so ornery they won't never give me a chance."

"It's going to be a great shock to the community when Jeffy starts to work, Mr. Oakley," observed Clarence, politely. "He's never done anything harder than wheel smoke from the gas-house. Where you going to put up, Jeffy, when you get your wages?"

"None of your durn lip!" screamed Jeffy, white with rage.

"I suppose you'll want to return the horse-blanket and whip. You can leave 'em here with me. I'll take 'em home to the old man," remarked the boy, affably.

"I wouldn't trust you with ten cents; you know mighty well I wouldn't," retorted Jeffy.

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"Good reason why—you ain't never had that much."

Dan Oakley's step was heard approaching the door, and the wordy warfare ceased abruptly. Clarence got out of the way as quickly as possible, for he feared he might be asked to do something, and he had other plans for the morning.

Jeffy was handed over to McClintock's tender mercies, who put him to work in the yards.

It was pay-day in the car-shops, and Oakley posted a number of notices in conspicuous places about the works. They announced a ten-per-cent. reduction in the wages of the men, the cut to go into effect immediately.

By-and-by McClintock came in from the yards. He was hot and perspiring, and his check shirt clung moistly to his powerful shoulders. As he crossed to the water-cooler, he said to Dan:

"Well, we've lost him already. I guess he wasn't keen for work."

Oakley looked up inquiringly from the letter he was writing.

"I mean Jeffy. He stuck to it for a couple of hours, and then Pete saw him making a sneak through the cornfield towards the crick. I haven't told your father yet."

Dan laughed.

"I thought it would be that way. Have you seen the notices?"

"Yes," nodding.

"Heard anything from the men yet?"

"Not a word."

McClintock returned to the yards. It was the noon hour, and in the shade of one of the sheds he found a number of the hands at lunch, who lived too far from the shops to go home to dinner.

"Say, Milt," said one of these, "have you tumbled to the notices?—ten per cent. all round. You'll be having to go down in your sock for coin."

"It's there all right," cheerfully.

"I knew when Cornish came down here there would be something drop shortly. I ain't never known it to fail. The old skinflint! I'll bet he ain't losing any money."

"You bet he ain't, not he," said a second, with a short laugh.

The first man, Branyon by name, bit carefully into the wedge-shaped piece of pie he was holding in his hand. "If I was as rich as Cornish I'm damned if I'd be such an infernal stiff! What the hell good is his money doing him, anyhow?"

"What does the boss say, Milt?"

"That wages will go back as soon as he can put them back."

"Yes, they will! Like fun!" said Branyon, sarcastically.

"You're a lot of kickers, you are," commented McClintock, good-naturedly. "You don't believe for one minute, do you, that the Huckleberry or the shops ever earned a dollar?"

"You can gamble on it that they ain't ever cost

Cornish a red cent," said Branyon, as positively as a mouthful of pie would allow.

"I wouldn't be too sure about that," said the master-mechanic, walking on.

"I bet he ain't out none on this," remarked Branyon, cynically. "If he was he wouldn't take it so blamed easy."

The men began to straggle back from their various homes and to form in little groups about the yards and in the shops. They talked over the cut and argued the merits of the case, as men will, made their comments on Cornish, who was generally conceded to be as mean in money matters as he was fortunate, and then went back to their work when the one-o'clock whistle blew, in a state of high good-humor with themselves and their critical ability.

The next day the *Herald* dealt with the situation at some length. The whole tone of the editorial was rancorous and bitter. It spoke of the parsimony of the new management, which had been instanced by a number of recent dismissals among men who had served the road long and faithfully, and who deserved other and more considerate treatment. It declared that the cut was but the beginning of the troubles in store for the hands, and characterized it as an attempt on the part of the new management to curry favor with Cornish, who was notoriously hostile to the best interests of labor. It wound up by regretting that the men were not organized, as proper organization would have enabled

them to meet this move on the part of the management.

When Oakley read the obnoxious editorial his blood grew hot and his mood belligerent. It showed evident and unusual care in the preparation, and he guessed correctly that it had been written and put in type in readiness for the cut. It was a direct personal attack, too, for the expression "the new management," which was used over and over, could mean but the one thing.

Dan's first impulse was to hunt Ryder up and give him a sound thrashing, but his better sense told him that while this rational mode of expressing his indignation would have been excusable enough a few years back, when he was only a brakeman, as the manager of the Buckhorn and Antioch Railroad it was necessary to pursue a more pacific policy.

He knew he could be made very unpopular if these attacks were persisted in. This he did not mind especially, except as it would interfere with the carrying out of his plans and increase his difficulties. After thinking it over he concluded that he would better see Ryder and have a talk with him. It would do no harm, he argued, and it might do some good, provided, of course, that he could keep his temper.

He went directly to the *Herald* office, and found Griff in and alone. When Dan strode into the office, looking rather warm, the latter turned a trifle pale, for he had his doubts about the manager's temper, and no doubts at all about his muscular development, which was imposing.

"I came in to see what you meant by this, Ryder," his caller said, and he held out the paper folded to the insulting article. Ryder assumed to examine it carefully, but he knew every word there.

"Oh, this? Oh yes! The story of the reduction in wages down at the car-shops. There! You can take it from under my nose; I can see quite clearly."

"Well?"

"Well," repeated Ryder after him, with exasperating composure. The editor was no stranger to intrusions of this sort, for his sarcasms were frequently personal. His manner varied to suit each individual case. When the wronged party stormed into the office, wrathful and loud-lunged, he was generally willing to make prompt reparation, especially if his visitor had the advantage of physical preponderance on his side. When, however, the caller was uncertain and palpably in awe of him, as sometimes happened, he got no sort of satisfaction. With Oakley he pursued a middle course.

"Well?" he repeated.

"What do you mean by this?"

"I think it speaks for itself, don't you?"

"I went into this matter with you, and you know as well as I do why the men are cut. This," striking the paper contemptuously with his open hand, "is the worst sort of rubbish, but it may serve to make the men feel that they are being wronged, and it is an attack on me."

"Did you notice that? I didn't know but it was too subtle for you."

He couldn't resist the gibe at Oakley's expense.

"Disguised, of course, but intended to give the men less confidence in me. Now, I'm not going to stand any more of this sort of thing!"

He was conscious he had brought his remarks to a decidedly lame conclusion.

"And I'll tell you one thing, Mr. Oakley, I'm editor of the *Herald*, and I don't allow any man to dictate to me what I shall print. That's a point I'll pass on for myself."

"You know the situation. You know that the general will dispose of his interests here unless they can be made self-sustaining; and, whether you like him or not, he stands as a special providence to the town."

"I only know what you have told me," sneeringly.

Oakley bit his lips. He saw it would have been better to have left Ryder alone. He felt his own weakness, and his inability to force him against his will to be fair. He gulped down his anger and chagrin.

"I don't see what you can gain by stirring up this matter."

"Perhaps you don't."

"Am I to understand you are hostile to the road?"

"If that means you—yes. You haven't helped yourself by coming here as though you could bully me into your way of thinking. I didn't get much satisfaction from my call on you. You let me know

you could attend to your own affairs, and I can attend to mine just as easily. I hope you appreciate that."

Dan turned on his heel and left the office, cursing himself for his stupidity in having given the editor an opportunity to get even.

CHAPTER XII

IN the course of the next few days Dan decided that there was no danger of trouble from the hands. Things settled back into their accustomed rut. He was only a little less popular, perhaps.

He was indebted to Clarence for the first warning he received as to what was in store for him.

It came about in this way. Clarence had retired to the yards, where, secure from observation, he was indulging in a quiet smoke, furtively keeping an eye open for McClintock, whose movements were uncertain, as he knew from sad experience.

A high board fence was in front of him, shutting off the yards from the lower end of the town. At his back was a freight car, back of that again were the interlacing tracks, and beyond them a cornfield and Billup's Fork, with its inviting shade of sycamores and willows and its tempting swimming-holes.

Suddenly he heard a scrambling on the opposite side of the fence, and ten brown fingers clutched the tops of the boards, then a battered straw hat came on a level with the fingers, at the same instant a bare foot and leg were thrown over the fence, and the owner of the battered straw hat swung himself into view. All this while a dog whined and yelped; then follow-

ed a vigorous scratching sound, and presently a small, dilapidated-looking yellow cur squeezed itself beneath the fence. Clarence recognized the intruders. It was Branyon's boy, Augustus, commonly called "Spide," because of his exceeding slimness and the length of his legs, and his dog Pink.

As soon as Branyon's boy saw Clarence he balanced himself deftly on the top of the fence with one hand and shaded his eyes elaborately with the other. An amiable, if toothless, smile curled his lips. When he spoke it was with deep facetiousness.

"Hi! come out from behind that roll of paper!"

But Clarence said not a word. He puffed away at his cigarette, apparently oblivious of everything save the contentment it gave him, and as he puffed Spide's mouth worked and watered sympathetically. His secret admiration was tremendous. Here was Clarence in actual and undisturbed possession of a whole cigarette. He had to purchase his cigarettes in partnership with some other boy, and go halves on the smoking of them. It made him feel cheap and common.

"Say! got one of them coffin-tacks that ain't working?" he inquired. Clarence gazed off up the tracks, ignoring the question and the questioner. Spide's presence was balm to his soul. But as one of the office force of the Buckhorn and Antioch he felt a certain lofty reserve to be incumbent upon him. Besides, he and Spide had been engaged in a recent rivalry for Susie Poppleton's affections. It is true he had achieved a brilliant success over his rival,

but that a mere school-boy should have ventured to oppose him, a salaried man, had struck him as an unpardonable piece of impertinence for which there could be no excuse.

Spide, however, had taken the matter most philosophically. He had recognized that he could not hope to compete with a youth who possessed unlimited wealth, which he was willing to lay out on chewing-gum and candy, his experience being that the sex was strictly mercenary and incapable of a disinterested love. Of course he had much admired Miss Poppleton; from the crown of her small dark head, with its tightly braided "pig-tails," down to her trim little foot he had esteemed her as wholly adorable; but, after all, his affair of the heart had been an affair of the winter only. With the coming of summer he had found more serious things to think of. He was learning to swim and to chew tobacco. The mastering of these accomplishments pretty well occupied his time.

"Say!" he repeated, "got another?"

Still Clarence blinked at the fierce sunlight which danced on the rails, and said nothing. Spide slid skilfully down from his perch, but his manner had undergone a change.

"Who throwed that snipe away, anyhow?" he asked, disdainfully. Clarence turned his eyes slowly in his direction.

"Lookee here. You fellows got to keep out of these yards, or I'll tell McClintock. First we know some of you kids will be getting run over, and then

your folks will set up a lively howl. Get on out! It ain't no place for little boys!"

He put the cigarette between his lips and took a deep and tantalizing pull at it. Spide kept to his own side of the ditch that ran between the fence and the tracks.

"Huh!" with infinite scorn. "Who's a kid? You won't be happy till I come over there and lick you!"

"First thing I know you'll be stealing scrap iron!"

"My gosh! The Huckleberry 'd have to stop running if I swiped a coupling-pin!"

Clarence had recourse to the cigarette, and again Spide was consumed with torturing jealousies. "Where did you shoot that snipe, anyhow?" he inquired, insultingly.

Once more Clarence allowed his glance to stray off up the tracks.

"For half a cent I'd come across and do what I say!" added Spide, stooping down to roll up his trousers leg, and then easing an unelastic "gallus" that cut his shoulders. This elicited a short and contemptuous grunt from Clarence. He was well pleased with himself. He felt Spide's envy. It was sweet and satisfying.

"Say!" with sudden animation. "You fellers will be going around on your uppers in a day or so. I'll bet you'd give a heap to know what I know!"

"I wouldn't give a darned cent to know all you know or ever will know!" retorted Clarence, promptly.

"Some people's easily upset here in the cupola," tapping his brimless covering. "I wouldn't want to give you brain-fever; I don't hate you bad enough."

"Well, move on. You ain't wanted around here. It may get me into trouble if I'm seen fooling away my time on you."

"I hope to hell it will," remarked Branyon's boy, Augustus, with cordial ill-will and fluent profanity. He was not a good little boy. He himself would have been the first to spurn the idea of personal sanctity. But he was literally bursting with the importance of the facts which he possessed, and Clarence's indifference gave him no opening.

"What will you bet there ain't a strike?"

"I ain't betting this morning," said Clarence, blandly. "But if there is one we are ready for it. You bet the hands won't catch us napping. We are ready for 'em any time and all the time." This, delivered with a large air, impressed Spide exceedingly.

"Have you sent for the militia a'ready?" he asked, anxiously.

"That's saying," noting the effect of his words. "I can't go blabbing about, telling what the road's up to, but we are awake, and the hands will get it in the neck if they tackle the boss. He's got darn little use for laboring men, anyhow."

To Clarence, Oakley was the most august person he had ever known. He religiously believed his position to be only second in point of importance and power to that of the President of the United States.

He was wont to invest him with purely imaginary attributes, and to lie about him at a great rate among his comrades, who were ready to credit any report touching a man who was reputed to be able to ride on the cars without a ticket. Human grandeur had no limits beyond this.

"There was a meeting last night. I bet you didn't know that," said Spide.

"I heard something of it. Was your father at the meeting, Spide?" he asked, dropping his tone of hostility for one of gracious familiarity. The urchin promptly crossed the ditch and stood at his side.

"Of course the old man was. You don't suppose he wouldn't be in it?"

"Oh, well, let 'em kick. You see the boss is ready for 'em," remarked Clarence, indifferently. He wanted to know what Spide knew, but he didn't feel that he could afford to show any special interest. "Where you going—swimming?" he added.

"Yep." But Spide was not ready to drop the fascinating subject of the strike. He wished to astonish Clarence, who was altogether too knowing.

"The meeting was in the room over Jack Britt's saloon," he volunteered.

"I suppose you think we didn't know that up at the office. We got our spies out. There ain't nothing the hands can do we ain't on to."

Spide wrote his initials in the soft bank of the ditch with his big toe, while he meditated on what he could tell next.

"Well, sir, you'd 'a' been surprised if you'd 'a' been there."

"Was you there, Spide?"

"Yep."

"Oh, come off; you can't stuff me."

"I was, too, there. The old lady sent me down to fetch pap home. She was afraid he'd get full. Joe Stokes was there, and Lou Bentick, and a whole slew of others, and Griff Ryder."

Clarence gasped with astonishment. "Why, he ain't one of the hands."

"Well, he's on their side."

"What you giving us?"

"Say, they are going to make a stiff kick on old man Oakley working in the shops. They got it in for him good and strong." He paused to weigh the effect of this, and then went on rapidly: "He's done something. Ryder knows about it. He told my old man and Joe Stokes. They say he's got to get out. What's a convicted criminal, anyhow?"

"What do you want to know that for, Spide?" questioned the artful Clarence, with great presence of mind.

"Well, that's what old man Oakley is. I heard Ryder say so myself, and pap and Joe Stokes just kicked themselves because they hadn't noticed it before, I suppose. My! but they were hot! Say, you'll see fun to-morrow. I shouldn't be surprised if they sent you all a-kiting."

Clarence was swelling with the desire to tell Oak-

ley what he had heard. He took the part of a pack of cigarettes from his pocket.

"Have one?" he said.

Spide promptly availed himself of his companion's liberality.

"Well, so long," the latter added. "I got to get back," and a moment later he might have been seen making his way cautiously in the direction of the office, while Spide, his battered hat under his arm, and the cigarette clutched in one hand, was skipping gayly across the cornfield towards the creek followed by Pink. He was bound for the "Slidy," a swimming-hole his mother had charged him on no account to visit. Under these peculiar circumstances it was quite impossible for him to consider any other spot. Nowhere else was the shade so cool and dense, nowhere else did the wild mint scent the summer air with such seductive odors, and nowhere else were such social advantages to be found.

There were always big boys hanging about the "Slidy" who played cards and fished and loafed, but mostly loafed, because it was the easiest, and here Mr. Tink Brown, Jeffy's logical successor and unofficial heir apparent, held court from the first of June to the last of August. The charm of his society no respectable small boy was able to withstand. His glittering indecencies made him a sort of hero, and his splendid lawless state was counted worthy of emulation.

But Spide discovered that the way of the trans-

gressor is sometimes as hard as the moralists would have us believe.

It was the beginning of the season, and a group of boys, in easy undress, were clustered on the bank above the swimming-hole. They were "going in" as soon as an important question should be decided.

The farmer whose fields skirted Billup's Fork at this point usually filled in the "Slidy" every spring with bits of rusty barb-wire and osage-orange cuttings. The youth of Antioch who were prejudiced maintained that he did it to be mean, but the real reason was that he wished to discourage the swimmers, who tramped his crops and stole his great yellow pumpkins to play with in the water.

The time-honored method of determining the condition of the hole was beautifully simple. It was to catch a small boy and throw him in, and until this rite was performed the big boys used the place but gingerly. Mr. Brown and his friends were waiting for this small boy to happen along, when the unsuspecting Spide ran down the bank. He was promptly seized by the mighty Tink.

"Been in yet, Spide?" asked his captor, genially.

"Nope."

"Then this is your chance." Whereat Spide began to cry. He didn't want to go in. All at once he remembered he had promised his mother he wouldn't and that his father had promised him a licking if he did—two excellent reasons why he should stay out—but Tink only pushed him towards the water's edge.

"You're hurting me! Lemme alone, you big

loafer! Lemme go, or I'll tell the old man on you!" and he scratched and clawed, but Tink merely laughed, and the other boys advised him to "chuck the little shaver in."

"Lemme take off my shirt and pants! Lemme take off my pants—just my pants, Tink!" he entreated.

But he was raised on high and hurled out into the stream where the sunlight flashed among the shadows cast by the willows. His hat went one way and his cigarette another. Pink was considerately tossed after him, and all his earthly possessions were afloat.

There was a splash, and he disappeared from sight to reappear a second later, with streaming hair and dripping face.

"How is it?" chorussed the big boys, who were already pulling off their clothes, as they saw that neither barb-wire nor osage-orange brush festooned the swimmer.

"Bully!" ecstatically, and he dived dexterously into the crown of his upturned hat, which a puff of wind had sent dancing gayly down-stream.

CHAPTER XIII

"SAY!" Clarence blurted out, "there's going to be a strike!"

Oakley glanced up from his writing.

"What's that you are telling me, Clarence?"

"There's going to be a strike, Mr. Oakley."

Dan smiled good-naturedly at the boy.

"I guess that has blown over, Clarence," he said, kindly.

"No, it ain't. The men had a meeting last night. It was in the room over Jack Britt's saloon. I've just been talking with a fellow who was there; he told me."

"Sit down," said Oakley, pushing a chair towards him.

"Now, what is it?" as soon as he was seated. And Clarence, editing his reminiscences as he saw fit, gave a tolerably truthful account of his conversation with Spide. The source of his information, its general incompleteness, and the frequent divergences, occasioned by the boy's attempt to incorporate into the narrative a satisfactory reason for his own presence in the yards, did not detract from its value in Oakley's estimation. The mere fact that the men had held a meeting was in itself

significant. Such a thing was new to Antioch, as yet unvisited by labor troubles.

"What is that you say about my father?" For he had rather lost track of the story and caught at the sudden mention of his father's name.

"Spide says they got it in for him. I can't just remember what he did say. It was something or other Griff Ryder knows about him. It's funny, but it's clean gone out of my head, Mr. Oakley."

Oakley started. What could Ryder know about his father? What could any one know?

He was not left long in doubt. The next morning, shortly after he arrived at the office, he heard the heavy shuffling of many feet on the narrow platform outside his door, and a deputation from the carpenter-shop, led by Joe Stokes and Branyon, entered the room. For a moment or so the men stood in abashed silence about the door, and then moved over to his desk.

Oakley pushed back his chair, and, as they approached, came slowly to his feet. There was a hint of anger in his eyes. The whole proceeding smacked of insolence. The men were in their shirt-sleeves and overalls, and had on their hats. Stokes put up his hand and took off his hat. The others accepted this as a signal, and one after another removed theirs. Then followed a momentary shuffling as they bunched closer. Several, who looked as if they would just as soon be somewhere else, breathed deep and hard. The office force—Kerr, Holt, and Miss Walton—suspended their various tasks and

stood up so as not to miss anything that was said or done.

"Well, men, what is it?" asked Oakley, sharply —so sharply that Clarence, who was at the water-cooler, started. He had never heard the manager use that tone before.

Stokes took a step forward and cleared his throat, as if to speak. Then he looked at his comrades, who looked back their encouragement at him.

"We want a word with you, Mr. Oakley," said he.

"What have you to say?"

"Well, sir, we got a grievance," began Stokes, weakly, but Branyon pushed him to one side hastily and took his place. He was a stockily built Irish-American, with plenty of nerve and a loose tongue. The men nudged each other. They knew Mike would have his say.

"It's just this, Mr. Oakley: There's a man in the carpenter-shop who's got to get out. We won't work with him no longer!"

"That's right," muttered one or two of the men under their breath.

"Whom do you mean?" asked Oakley, and his tone was tense and strenuous, for he knew. There was an awkward silence. Branyon fingered his hat a trifle nervously. At last he said, doggedly:

"The man who's got to go is your father."

"Why?" asked Oakley, sinking his voice. He guessed what was coming next, but the question seemed dragged from him. He had to ask it.

"We got nothing against you, Mr. Oakley, but

we won't work in the same shop with a convicted criminal."

"That's right," muttered the chorus of men again.

Oakley's face flushed scarlet. Then every scrap of color left it.

"Get out of here!" he ordered, hotly.

"Don't we get our answer?" demanded Branyon.

While the interview was in progress, McClintock had entered, and now stood at the opposite end of the room, an attentive listener.

"No," cried Oakley, hoarsely. "I'll put whom I please to work in the shops. Leave the room all of you!"

The men retreated before his fury, their self-confidence rather dashed by it. One by one they backed sheepishly out of the door, Branyon being the last to leave. As he quitted the room he called to Dan:

"We'll give you until to-morrow to think it over, but the old man's got to go."

McClintock promptly followed Branyon, and Clarence darted after him. He was in time to witness the uncorking of the master-mechanic's vials of wrath, and to hear the hot exchange of words which followed.

"You can count your days with the Huckleberry numbered, Branyon," he said. "I'm damned if I'll have you under me after this."

"We'll see about that," retorted Branyon, roughly. "Talk's cheap."

"What's the old man ever done to you, you infernal loafer?"

"Shut up, Milt, and keep your shirt on!" said Stokes, in what he intended should be conciliatory tones. "We only want our rights."

"We'll have 'em, too," said Branyon, shaking his head ominously. "We ain't Dagoes or Pollacks. We're American mechanics, and we know our rights."

"You're a sneak, Branyon. What's he ever done to you?"

"Oh, you go to hell!" ruffling up his shirt-sleeves.

"Well, sir," said McClintock, his gray eyes flashing, "you needn't be so particular about the old man's record. You know as much about the inside of a prison as he does."

"You're a damn liar!" Nevertheless McClintock spoke only the truth. At Branyon's last word he smashed his fist into the middle of the carpenter's sour visage with a heavy, sickening thud. No man called him a liar and got away with it.

"Gee!" gasped the closely attentive but critical Clarence. "What a soaker!" Branyon fell up against the side of the building near which they were standing. Otherwise he would have gone his length upon the ground, and the hands rushed in between the two men.

Stokes and Bentick dragged their friend away by main strength. The affair had gone far enough. They didn't want a fight.

McClintock marched into the office, crossed to the water-cooler, and filled himself a tumbler; then he turned an unruffled front on Oakley.

"I guess we'd better chuck those fellows—fire 'em

out bodily, the impudent cusses! What do you say, Mr. Oakley?"

But Dan was too demoralized to consider or even reply to this. He was feeling a burning sense of shame and disgrace. The whole town must know his father's history, or some garbled version of it. Worse still, Constance Emory must know. The pride of his respectability was gone from him. He felt that he had cheated the world of a place to which he had no right, and now he was found out. He could not face Kerr, nor Holt, nor McClintock. But this was only temporary. He couldn't stand among his ruins. Men survive disgrace and outlive shame just as they outlive sorrow and suffering. Nothing ever stops. Then he recognized that, since his secret had been wrested from him, there was no longer discovery to fear. A sense of freedom and relief came when he realized this. The worst had happened, and he could still go on. How the men had learned about his father he could not understand, but instinct told him he had Ryder to thank. Following up the clew Kenyon had given him, he had carefully looked into Roger Oakley's record, a matter that simply involved a little correspondence.

He had told Branyon and Stokes only what he saw fit, and had pledged himself to support the men in whatever action they took. He would drive Oakley out of Antioch. That was one of his motives; he was also bent on cultivating as great a measure of personal popularity as he could. It would be use-

ful to Kenyon, and so advantageous to himself. The Congressman had large ambitions. If he brought his campaign to a successful issue it would make him a power in the State. Counting in this victory, Ryder had mapped out his own career. Kenyon had force and courage, but his judgment and tact were only of a sort. Ryder aspired to supply the necessary brains for his complete success. Needless to say, Kenyon knew nothing of these benevolent intentions on the part of his friend. He could not possibly have believed that he required anything but votes.

Oakley turned to Clarence.

"Run into the carpenter-shop, and see if you can find my father. If he is there, ask him to come here to me at once."

The boy was absent only a few moments. Roger Oakley had taken off his work clothes and had gone up-town before the men left the shop. He had not returned.

Dan closed his desk and put on his hat.

"I am going to the hotel," he said to Kerr. "If anybody wants to see me you can tell them I'll be back this afternoon."

"Very well, Mr. Oakley." The treasurer was wondering what would be his superior's action. Would he resign and leave Antioch, or would he try and stick it out?

Before he left the room, Dan said to McClintock:

"I hope you won't have any further trouble, Milt. Better keep an eye on that fellow Branyon."

McClintock laughed shortly, but made no answer, and for the rest of the morning Clarence dogged his steps in the hope that the quarrel would be continued under more favorable circumstances. In this he was disappointed. Branyon had been induced to go home for repairs, and had left the yards immediately after the trouble occurred, with a wet handkerchief held gingerly to a mashed and bloody nose. His fellows had not shown the sympathy he felt they should have shown under the circumstances. They told him he had had enough, and that it was well to stop with that.

Dan hurried up-town to the hotel. He found his father in his room, seated before an open window in his shirt-sleeves, and with his Bible in his lap. He glanced up from the book as his son pushed open the door.

"Well, Dannie?" he said, and his tones were mild, meditative, and inquiring.

"I was looking for you, father. They told me you'd come up-town."

"So I did; as soon as I heard there was going to be trouble over my working in the shops I left."

"Did they say anything to you?"

"Not a word, Dannie, but I knew what was coming, and quit work."

"You shouldn't have done it, daddy," said Dan, seating himself on the edge of the bed near the old man. "I can't let them say who shall work in the shops and who not. The whole business was trumped up out of revenge for the cut. They want to get

even with me for that, you see. If I back down and yield this point, there is no telling what they'll ask next—probably that the wages be restored to the old figure."

He spoke quite cheerfully, for he saw his father was cruelly hurt.

"It was all a mistake, Dannie—my coming to you, I mean," Roger Oakley said, shutting the book reverently and laying it to one side. "The world's a small place, after all, and we should have known we couldn't keep our secret. It's right I should bear my own cross, but it's not your sin, and now it presses hardest on you. I'm sorry, Dannie—" and his voice shook with the emotion he was striving to hide.

"No, no, father. To have you here has been a great happiness to me."

"Has it, Dannie? has it really?" with a quick smile. "I am glad you can say so, for it's been a great happiness to me—greater than I deserved," and he laid a big hand caressingly on his son's.

"We must go ahead, daddy, as if nothing had happened. If we let this hurt us, we'll end by losing all our courage."

"It's been a knock-out blow for me, Dannie," with a wistful sadness, "and I've got to go away. It's best for you I should. I've gone in one direction and you've gone another. You can't reconcile opposites. I've been thinking of this a good deal. You're young, and got your life ahead of you, and you'll do big things before you're done, and people will forget.

I can't drag you down just because I happen to be your father and love you. Why, I'm of a different class even, but I can't go on. I'm just as I am, and I can't change myself."

"Why, bless your heart, daddy," cried Dan, "I wouldn't have you changed. You're talking nonsense. I won't let you go away."

"But the girl, Dannie, the girl—the doctor's daughter! You see I hear a lot of gossip in the shop, and even if you haven't told me, I know."

"We may as well count that at an end," said Dan, quietly.

"Do you think of leaving here?"

"No. If I began by running, I'd be running all the rest of my life. I shall remain until I've accomplished everything I've set out to do, if it takes ten years."

"And what about Miss Emory, Dannie? If you are going to stay, why is that at an end?"

"I dare say she'll marry Mr. Ryder. Anyhow, she won't marry me."

"But I thought you cared for her?"

"I do, daddy."

"Then why do you give up? You're as good as he is any day."

"I'm not her kind, that's all. It has nothing to do with this. It would have been the same, anyhow. I'm not her kind."

Roger Oakley turned this over slowly in his mind. It was most astonishing. He couldn't grasp it.

"Do you mean she thinks she is better than you are?" he asked, curiously.

"Something of that sort, I suppose," dryly. "I want you to come back into the shops, father."

"I can't do it, Dannie. I'm sorry if you wish it, but it's impossible. I want to keep out of sight. Back East, when they pardoned me, every one knew, and I didn't seem to mind, but here it's not the same. I can't face it. It may be cowardly, but I can't."

CHAPTER XIV

OAKLEY had told his father he was going to call at the Emorys'. He wanted to see Constance once more. Then it didn't much matter what happened.

As he passed up the street he was conscious of an impudent curiosity in the covert glances the idlers on the corners shot at him. With hardly an exception they turned to gaze after him as he strode by. He realized that an unsavory distinction had been thrust upon him. He had become a marked man. He set his lips in a grim smile. This was what he would have to meet until the silly wonder of it wore off, or a fresh sensation took its place, and there would be the men at the shops; their intercourse had hitherto been rather pleasant and personal, as he had recognized certain responsibilities in the relation which had made him desire to be more than a mere task-master. The thought of his theories caused him to smile again. His humanitarianism had received a jolt from which it would not recover in many a long day.

The hands already hated him as a tyrant, and probably argued that his authority was impaired by the events of the morning, though how they ar-

rived at any such conclusion was beyond him, but he had felt something of the kind in Branyon's manner. When the opportunity came it would be a satisfaction to undeceive them, and he was not above wishing this opportunity might come soon, for his mood was bitter and revengeful, when he recalled their ignorant and needlessly brutal insolence.

Early as he was, he found, as he had anticipated when he started out, that Ryder was ahead of him. The editor was lounging on the Emorys' porch with the family. He had dined with them.

As Dan approached he caught the sound of Constance's voice. There was no other voice in Antioch which sounded the same, or possessed the same quality of refinement and culture. His heart beat with quickened pulsations and his pace slackened. He paused for an instant in the shadow of the lilac-bushes that shut off the well-kept lawn from the street. Then he forced himself to go on. There was no gain in deferring his sentence; better have it over with. Yet when he reached the gate he would gladly have passed it without entering had it not been that he never abandoned any project simply because it was disagreeable. He had done too many disagreeable things not to have outlived this species of cowardice.

The instant he saw him, the doctor rose from his seat on the steps and came quickly down the walk. There was no mistaking the cordiality he gave his greeting, for he intended there should be none. Mrs. Emory, too, took pains that he should feel the friend-

liness of her sentiment towards him. Constance, however, appeared embarrassed and ill at ease, and Dan's face grew very white. He felt that he had no real appreciation of the changed conditions since his father's story had become public property. He saw it made a difference in the way his friends viewed him. He had become hardened, and it had been impossible for him to foresee just how it would affect others, but to these people it was plainly a shock. The very kindliness he had experienced at the hands of the doctor and Mrs. Emory only served to show how great the shock was. In their gracious, generous fashion they had sought to make it easy for him.

Oakley and the editor did not speak. Civility seemed the rankest hypocrisy under the circumstances. A barely perceptible inclination of the head sufficed, and then Ryder turned abruptly to Miss Emory and resumed his conversation with her.

Dan seated himself beside the doctor on the steps. He was completely crushed. He hadn't the wit to leave, and he knew that he was a fool for staying. What was the good in carrying on the up-hill fight any longer? Courage is a fine quality, no doubt, but it is also well for a man to have sense enough to know when he is fairly beaten, and he was fairly beaten.

He took stock of the situation. Quite independent of his hatred of the fellow, he resented Ryder's presence there beside Constance. But what was the

use of struggling? The sooner he banished all thought of her the better it would be for him. His chances had never been worth considering.

He stole a glance at the pair, who had drawn a little to one side, and were talking in low tones and with the intimacy of long acquaintance. He owned they were wonderfully well suited to each other. Ryder was no mean rival, had it come to that. The world had given him its rub. He knew perfectly the life with which Miss Emory was familiar, his people had been the right sort. He was well-born and well-bred, and he showed it.

It dawned upon the unwilling Oakley slowly and by degrees that to Constance Emory he must be nothing more nor less than the son of a murderer. He had never quite looked at it in that light before. He had been occupied with the effect rather than the cause, but he was sure that if Ryder had told her his father's history he had made the most of his opportunity. He wondered how people felt about a thing of this kind. He knew now what his portion would be. Disgrace is always vicarious in its consequences. The innocent generally suffer indiscriminately along with the guilty.

The doctor talked a steady stream at Oakley, but he managed to say little that made any demand on Dan's attention. He was sorry for the young man. He had liked him from the start, and he believed but a small part of what he had heard. It is true he had had the particulars from Ryder, but Ryder said what he had to say with his usual lazy indifference, as if

his interest was the slightest, and had vouched for no part of it.

He would hardly have dared admit that he himself was the head and front of the offending. Dr. Emory would not have understood how it could have been any business of his. It would have finished him with the latter. As it was he had been quick to resent his glib, sneering tone.

But Dan's manner convinced the doctor that there were some grounds for the charges made by the hands when they demanded Roger Oakley's dismissal, or else he was terribly hurt by the occurrence. While Dr. Emory was reaching this conclusion Dan was cursing himself for his stupidity. It would have been much wiser for him to have remained away until Antioch quieted down. Perhaps it would have been fairer, too, to his friends, but since he had blundered he would try and see Miss Emory again; she should know the truth. It was characteristic of him that he should wish the matter put straight, even when there was no especial advantage to be gained.

Soon afterwards he took his leave. The doctor followed him down to the gate. There was a certain constraint in the manner of the two men, now that they were alone together. As they paused by the gate, Dr. Emory broke silence with:

"For God's sake, Oakley, what is this I hear about your father? I'd like your assurance that it is all a pack of lies."

A lump came into Dan's throat, and he answered, huskily:

"I am sure it is not at all as you have heard; I am sure the facts are quite different from the account you have had—"

"But—"

"No, I can't deny it outright, much as I'd like to."

"You don't mean— Pardon me, for, of course, I have no right to ask."

Dan turned away his face. "I don't know any one who has a better right to ask," he said.

"Well, I shouldn't have asked if I'd thought there was a word of truth in the story. I had hoped I could deny it for you. That was all."

"I guess I didn't appreciate how you would view it. I have lived in the shadow of it so long—"

The doctor looked aghast at the admission. He had not understood before that Dan was acknowledging the murder. Even yet he could not bring himself to believe it. Dan moved off a step, as if to go.

"Do you mean it is true, Oakley?" he asked, detaining him.

"Substantially, yes. Good-night," he added, hopelessly.

"Wait," hastily. "I don't want you to go just yet." He put out his hand frankly. "It's nothing you have done, anyhow," he said, as an afterthought.

"No, but I begin to think it might just as well have been."

Dr. Emory regarded him earnestly. "My boy, I'm awfully sorry for you, and I'm afraid you have

gotten in for more than you can manage. It looks as though your troubles were all coming in a bunch."

Dan smiled.

"My antecedents won't affect the situation down at the shops, if that is what you mean. The men may not like me any the better, or respect me any the more for knowing of them, but they will discover that that will make no difference where our relations are concerned."

"To be sure. I only meant that public opinion will be pretty strong against you. It somehow has an influence," ruefully.

"I suppose it has," rather sadly.

"Do you have to stay and face it? It might be easier, you know— I don't mean exactly to run away—"

"I am pledged to put the shops and road on a paying basis for General Cornish. He'd about made up his mind to sell to the M. & W. If he does, it will mean the closing of the shops, and they will never be opened up again. That will wipe Antioch off the map. Not so very long ago I had a good deal of sympathy for the people who would be ruined, and I can't change simply because they have, can I?" with a look on his face which belonged to his father.

The doctor stroked his beard meditatively and considered the question.

"I suppose there is such a thing as duty, but don't you think, under the circumstances, your responsibility is really very light?"

Dan laughed softly.

"I didn't imagine you would be the first to advise me to shirk it."

"I wouldn't ordinarily, but you don't know Antioch. They can make it very unpleasant for you. The town is in a fever of excitement over what has happened to-day. It seems the men are not through with you yet."

"Yes, I know. My father should have gone back. It looks as if I'd yielded, but I couldn't ask him to when I saw how he felt about it."

"You see the town lives off the shops and road. It is a personal matter to every man, woman, and child in the place."

"That's what makes me so mad at the stupid fools!" said Oakley, with some bitterness. "They haven't the brains to see that they have a lot more at stake than any one else. If they could gain anything from a fight I'd have plenty of patience with them, but they are sure losers. Even if they strike, and the shops are closed for the next six months, it won't cost Cornish a dollar; indeed, it will be money in his pocket."

"I don't think they'll strike," said the doctor. "I didn't mean that exactly, but they'll try to keep you on a strain."

"They have done about all they can in that direction. The worst has happened. I won't say it didn't bruise me up a bit. Why, I am actually sore in every bone and muscle. I was never so battered, but I'm beginning to get back, and I'm going to live the whole thing down right here. I can't have

skeletons that are liable to be unearthed at any moment."

He took a letter from his pocket, opened it and handed it to the doctor.

"I guess you can see to read this if you will step nearer the street-lamp."

The letter was an offer from one of the big Eastern lines. While the doctor knew very little of railroads, he understood that the offer was a fine one, and was impressed accordingly.

"I'd take it," he said. "I wouldn't fritter away my time here. Precious little thanks you'll ever get."

"I can't honorably break with General Cornish. In fact, I have already declined, but I wanted you to see the letter."

"I am sorry for your sake that you did. You are sure to have more trouble."

"So much the more reason why I should stay."

"I am quite frank with you, Oakley. Some strong influence is at work. No, it hasn't to do with your father. You can't well be held accountable for his acts."

Ryder's laughter reached them as he spoke. Oakley could see him faintly outlined in the moonlight, where he sat between Constance Emory and her mother. The influence was there. It was probably at work at that very moment.

"I wouldn't be made a martyr through any chivalrous sense of duty," continued the doctor. "I'd look out for myself."

Dan laughed again.

"You are preaching cowardice at a great rate."

"Well, what's the use of sacrificing one's self? You possess a most horrible sense of rectitude."

"I would like to ask a favor of you," hesitating.

"I was going to say if there was anything I could do—"

"If you don't mind," with increasing hesitancy, "will you say to Miss Emory for me that I'd like to see her to-morrow afternoon? I'll call about three—that is—"

"Yes, I'll tell her for you."

"Thank you," gratefully. "Thank you very much. You think she will be at home?" awkwardly, for he was afraid the doctor had misunderstood.

"I fancy so. I can see now, if you wish."

"No, don't. I'll call on the chance of finding her in."

"Just as you prefer."

Oakley extended his hand.

"I won't keep you standing any longer. Somehow our talk has helped me. Good-night."

"Good-night."

The doctor gazed abstractedly after the young man as he moved down the street, and he continued to gaze after him until he had passed from sight in the shadows that lay beneath the whispering maples.

CHAPTER XV

PERHAPS it showed lack of proper feeling, but Oakley managed to sleep off a good deal of his emotional stress, and when he left his hotel the next morning he was quite himself again.

His attitude towards the world was the decently cheerful one of the man who is earning a good salary, and whose personal cares are far from being numerous or pressing. He was still capable of looking out for Cornish's interests, and his own, too, if the need arose.

He went down to the office alert and vigorous. As he strode along he nodded and smiled at the people he met on the street. If the odium of his father's crime was to attach itself to him it should be without his help. Antioch might count him callous if it liked, but it must not think him weak.

His first official act was to go for Kerr, who was unusually cantankerous, and he gave that frigid gentleman a scare which lasted him for the better part of a week. For Kerr, who had convinced himself overnight that Oakley must resign, saw himself having full swing with the Huckleberry, and was disposed to treat his superior with airy indifference. He had objected to hunting up an old order-book Dan

wished to see, on the score that he was too busy, whereat, as Holt expressed it, the latter "jumped on him with both feet." His second official act was to serve formal notice on Branyon that he was dismissed from the shops, the master-mechanic's dismissal not having been accepted as final, for Branyon had turned up that morning with a black eye as if to go to work. He was even harsh with Miss Walton, and took exception to her spelling of a typewritten letter, which he was sending off to Cornish in London.

He also inspected every department in the shops, and was glad of an excuse he discovered to reprimand Joe Stokes, who was stock-keeper in the carpenter's room, for the slovenly manner in which the stock was handled. Then he returned to the office, and as a matter of discipline kept Kerr busy all the rest of the morning hauling dusty order-books from a dark closet. He felt that if excitement was what was wanted he was the one to furnish it. He had been too easy.

He even read Clarence, whom he had long since given up as hopeless, a moving lecture on the sin of idleness, and that astonished youth, who had fancied himself proof against criticism, actually searched for things to do, so impressed and startled was he by the manager's earnestness, and so fearful was he lest he should lose his place. If that happened, he knew his father would send him to school, and he almost preferred work, so he flew around, was under everybody's feet and in everybody's way, and when Oakley left the office at half-past two, Holt forcibly eject-

ed him, after telling him he was a first-class nuisance, and that if he stuck his nose inside the door again he'd skin him.

Feeling deeply his unpopularity, Clarence withdrew to the yards, where he sought out Dutch Pete. With tears in his eyes he begged the yard boss to find some task for him, it made no difference what, just so it was work; but Dutch Pete didn't want to be bothered, and sent him away with what Clarence felt to be a superfluity of bad words.

Naturally the office force gave a deep sigh of satisfaction when Oakley closed his desk and announced that he was going up-town and would not return. Miss Walton confided to Kerr that she just hoped he would never come back.

It was a little before three o'clock when Dan presented himself at the Emorys'. The maid who answered his ring ushered him into the parlor with marked trepidation. She was a timid soul. Then she swished from the room, but returned almost immediately to say that Miss Emory would be down in a moment.

"I wonder what's troubling her," muttered Oakley, with some exasperation. "You'd think she expected me to take her head off." He guessed that, like her betters, she was enjoying to the limit the sensation of which he was the innocent victim.

When Constance entered the room, he advanced a little uncertainly. She extended her hand quite cordially, however. There was no trace of embarrassment or constraint in her manner.

As he took her hand, Dan said, simply, going straight to the purpose of his call:

"I have thought a good deal over what I want to tell you, Miss Emory." Miss Emory instantly took the alarm, and was on the defensive. She enveloped herself in that species of inscrutable feminine reserve men find so difficult to penetrate. She could not imagine what he had to tell her that was so pressing. He was certainly very curious and unconventional. There was one thing she feared he might want to tell her which she was firmly determined not to hear.

Oakley drew forward a chair.

"Won't you sit down?" he asked, gravely.

"Thank you, yes." It was all so formal they both smiled.

Dan stood with his back to the fire-place, now filled with ferns, and rested an elbow on the mantel. There was an awkward pause. At last he said, slowly:

"It seems I've been the subject of a lot of talk during the last two days, and I have been saddled with a matter for which I am in no way responsible, though it appears to reflect on me quite as much as if I were."

"Really, Mr. Oakley"—began Constance, scenting danger ahead. But her visitor was in no mood to temporize.

"One moment, please," he said, hastily. "You have heard the story from Mr. Ryder."

"I have heard it from others as well."

"It has influenced you—"

"No, I won't say that," defiantly. She was not accustomed to being catechised.

"At least it has caused you to seriously doubt the wisdom of an acquaintance," blurted Oakley.

"You are very unfair," rising with latent anger.

"You will greatly oblige me by sitting down again."

And Constance, astonished beyond measure at his tone of command, sank back into her chair with a little smothered gasp of surprise. No one had ever ventured to speak to her like that before. It was a new experience.

"We've got to finish this, you know," explained Dan, with one of his frankest smiles, and there was a genial simplicity about his smile which was very attractive. Constance, however, was not to be propitiated, but she kept her seat. She was apprehensive lest Oakley would do something more startling and novel if she attempted to cut short the interview.

She stole a glance at him from under her long lashes. He was studying the carpet, apparently quite lost to the enormity of his conduct. "You have heard their side of the story, Miss Emory. I want you to hear mine. It's only fair, isn't it? You have heard that my father is an ex-convict?"

"Yes," with a tinge of regret.

"That he is a murderer?" plunging ahead mercilessly.

"Yes."

"And this is influencing you?"

"I suppose it is," helplessly. "It would naturally. It was a great shock to us all."

"Yes," agreed Dan, "I can understand, I think, just how you must look at it."

"We are very, very sorry for you, Mr. Oakley. I want to explain my manner last night. The whole situation was so excessively awkward. I am sure you must have felt it."

"I did," shortly.

"Oh, dear, I hope you didn't think me unkind!"

"No." Then he added, a trifle wearily, "It's taken me all this time to realize my position. I suppose I owe you some sort of an apology. You must have thought me fearfully thick-skinned." He hoped she would say no, but he was disappointed. Her conscience had been troubling her, and she was perfectly willing to share her remorse with him, since he was so ready to assume a part of it. She was as conventional as extreme respectability could make her, but she had never liked Oakley half so well. She admired his courage. He didn't whine. His very stupidity was in its way admirable, but it was certainly too bad he could not see just how impossible he was under the circumstances.

Dan raised his eyes to hers. "Miss Emory, the only time I remember to have seen my father until he came here a few weeks ago was through the grating of his cell door. My mother took me there as a little boy. When she died I came West, where no one knew me. I had already learned that, because of him, I was somehow judged and condemned, too. It

has always been hanging over me. I have always feared exposure. I suppose I can hush it up after a while, but there will always be some one to tell it to whoever will listen. It is no longer a secret."

"Was it fair to your friends, Mr. Oakley, that it was a secret?"

"I can't see what business it was of theirs. It's nothing I have done, and, anyhow, I have never had any friends until now I cared especially about."

"Oh!" and Miss Emory lowered her eyes. So long as he was merely determined and stupid he was safe, but should he become sentimental it might be embarrassing for them both.

"You have seen my father. Do you think from what you can judge from appearances that he would kill a man in cold blood? It was only after years of insult that it came to that, and then the other man was the aggressor. What my father did he did in self-defence, but I am pretty sure you were not told this."

He was swayed by a sense of duty towards his father, and a desire to vindicate him—he was so passive and enduring. The intimacy of their relation had begotten warmth and sympathy. They had been drawn nearer and nearer each other. The clannishness of his blood and race asserted itself. It was a point of honor with him to stand up for his friends, and to stand up for his father most of all. Could he, he would have ground his heel into Ryder's face for his part in circulating the garbled version of the old convict's history. Some one should suffer as he had been made to suffer.

"Of course, Mr. Ryder did not know what you have told me," Constance said, hastily. She could not have told why, but she had the uneasy feeling that Griff required a champion, that he was responsible.

"Then you did hear it from Mr. Ryder?"

She did not answer, and Oakley, taking her silence for assent, continued: "I don't suppose it was told you either that he was pardoned because of an act of conspicuous heroism, that, at the risk of his own life, he saved the lives of several nurses and patients in the hospital ward of the prison where he was confined." He looked inquiringly at Constance, but she was still silent. "Miss Emory, my father came to me to all intents an absolute stranger. Why, I even feared him, for I didn't know the kind of man he was, but I have come to have a great affection and regard for him. I respect him, too, most thoroughly. There is not an hour of the day when the remembrance of his crime is not with him. Don't you think it cowardly that it should have been ventilated simply to hurt me, when it must inevitably hurt him so much more? He has quit work in the shops, and he is determined to leave Antioch. I may find him gone when I return to the hotel."

"And you blame Mr. Ryder for this?"

"I do. It's part of the debt we'll settle some day."

"Then you are unjust. It was Mr. Kenyon. His cousin is warden of the prison. He saw your father there and remembered him."

"And told Mr. Ryder," with a contemptuous twist of the lips.

"There were others present at the time. They were not alone."

"But Mr. Ryder furnished the men with the facts."

"How do you know?" And once more her tone was one of defiance and defence.

"I have been told so, and I have every reason to believe I was correctly informed. Why, don't you admit that it was a cowardly piece of business to strike at me over my father's shoulder?" demanded Oakley, with palpable exasperation. The narrowness of her nature and her evasions galled him. Why didn't she show a little generous feeling. He expected she would be angry at his words and manner. On the contrary, she replied:

"I am not defending Mr. Ryder, as you seem to think, but I do not believe in condemning any one as you would condemn him—unheard."

She was unduly conscious, perhaps, that sound morality was on her side in this.

"Let us leave him out of it. After all, it is no odds who told. The harm is done."

"No, I shall ask Griff."

Dan smiled, doubtfully.

"That will settle it, if you believe what he tells you."

"His denial will be quite sufficient for me, Mr. Oakley," with chilly politeness.

There was a long pause, during which Dan looked at the carpet, and Miss Emory at nothing in particular. He realized how completely he had separated himself from the rest of the world in her eyes. The

hopelessness of his love goaded him on. He turned to her with sudden gentleness and said, penitently:

"Won't you forgive me?"

"I have nothing to forgive, Mr. Oakley," with lofty self-denial, and again Dan smiled doubtfully. Her saying so did not mean all it should have meant to him.

He swept his hand across his face with a troubled gesture. "I don't know what to do," he observed, ruefully. "The turf seems knocked from under my feet."

"It must have been a dreadful ordeal to pass through alone," she said. "We are so distressed for your sake." And she seemed so keenly sympathetic that Dan's heart gave a great bound in his breast. He put aside his mounting bitterness against her.

"I don't know why I came to see you to-day. I just wanted to, and so I came. I don't want to force a friendship."

Miss Emory murmured that no excuse was necessary.

"I am not too sure of that. I must appear bent on exhibiting myself and my woes, but I can't go into retirement, and I can't let people see I'm hurt."

His face took on a strong resolve. He couldn't go without telling her he loved her. His courage was suddenly riotous.

"Once, not long ago, I dared to believe I might level the differences between us. I recognized what they were, but now it is hopeless. There are some

things a man can't overcome, no matter how hard he tries, and I suppose being the son of a murderer is one of these." He paused, and, raising his eyes from the carpet, glanced at her, but her face was averted. He went on, desperately: "It's quite hopeless, but I have dared to hope, and I wanted you to know. I hate to leave things unfinished."

There was a long silence, then Miss Emory said, softly:

"I am so sorry."

"Which means you've never cared for me," dryly.

But she did not answer him. She was wondering how she would have felt had the confession come forty-eight hours earlier.

"I suppose I've been quite weak and foolish," said Dan.

She looked into his face with a slow smile.

"Why do you say that? Is it weak and foolish to care for some one?"

"Wasn't it?" with suddenly kindled hope, for he found it hard to give her up.

Miss Emory drew herself together with a sigh.

"I never thought of this," she said, which was hardly true; she had thought of it many times.

"No," admitted Dan, innocently enough, for her lightest word had become gospel to him, such was his love and reverence. "You couldn't know." Poor Oakley, his telling of it was the smallest part of the knowledge. "I think I see now, perfectly, how great a difference this affair of my father's must make. It sort of cuts me off from everything."

"It is very tragic. I wish you hadn't told me just now." Her lips trembled pathetically, and there were tears in her eyes.

"I've wanted to tell you for a long time."

"I didn't know."

"Of course you couldn't know," he repeated; then he plunged ahead recklessly, for he found there was a curious satisfaction in telling her of his love, hopeless as it was.

"It has been most serious and sacred to me. I shall never forget you—never. It has helped me in so many ways just to know you. It has changed so many of my ideals. I can't be grateful enough."

Miss Emory approved his attitude. It was as it should be. She was sorry for him. She admired his dignity and repression. It made him seem so strong and purposeful.

"You will find your happiness some day, Mr. Oakley. You will find some one more worthy than I." She knew he would be insensible to the triteness of her remark.

"No," generously, "that couldn't be. I'll not find any one. I'll not look."

"Oh, but you will."

Already, with the selfishness of her sex, and a selfishness which was greater than that of her sex, she was regretting that she had allowed him to step so easily into the position of a rejected lover.

"I don't want you to think it is going to ruin my life," he said, quietly, "or anything of that sort."

An appeal to her pity seemed weak and contemptible.

"I have striven to win what I can't have, what is not for me, and I am satisfied to have made the effort."

Miss Emory bit her lip. He was going to put her out of his life entirely. It was ended, and he would do his best to forget her with what speed he might, for he loved her, and was too generous to wish her to suffer. This generosity, needless to say, was too altruistic for Constance to fully appreciate its beauties. Indeed, she did not regard it as generosity at all. She resented it. She realized that probably she would not see him again; at least the meeting would not be of his making or choosing. There was to be no sentimental aftermath. He was preparing to go, like the sensible fellow he was, for good and all, and she rebelled against the decree. It seemed brutal and harsh. She was angry, hurt, and offended. Perhaps her conscience was troubling her, too. She knew she was mean and petty.

"I don't think it could have been very serious to you, Mr. Oakley," she murmured, gazing abstractedly from the window.

"I don't know why you think that. I can't say any more than I have said. It includes all." She wanted to tell him he gave up too easily.

"At any rate, we are friends," he added.

"Are you going?" she cried, with a ring of real longing and regret in her voice, lifted out of herself for the moment at the thought of losing him.

Dan nodded, and a look of pain came into his face.

"Yes, I am going."

"But you are not going to leave Antioch?"

"Oh, no!"

And Miss Emory felt a sense of relief. She rose from her chair. "Then I shall see you again?"

"Probably," smiling. "We couldn't well avoid seeing each other in a place the size of this."

He held out his hand frankly.

"And I sha'n't see you here any more?" she asked, softly.

"I guess not," a little roughly. The bitterness of his loss stung him. He felt something was wrong somewhere. He wondered, too, if she had been quite fair to him, if her ability to guard herself was entirely commendable, after all. He knew, in the end, his only memory of her would be that she was beautiful. He would carry this memory and a haunting sense of incompleteness with him wherever he went.

She placed her hand in his and looked up into his face with troubled, serious eyes.

"Good-bye." It was almost a whisper.

Dan crossed the room to the door and flung it open. For an instant he wavered on the threshold, but a moment later he was striding down the street, with his hat jammed needlessly low over his ears, and his hands thrust deep in his trousers pockets.

At the window, Constance, with a white, scared face, was watching him from between the parted curtains. She hoped he would look back, but he never once turned his head.

CHAPTER XVI

ON Thursday the *Herald* published its report of the trouble at the shops. Oakley had looked forward to the paper's appearance with considerable eagerness. He hoped to glean from it some idea of the tactics the men would adopt, and in this he was not disappointed. Ryder served up his sensation, which was still a sensation, in spite of the fact that it was common property and two days old before it was accorded the dignity of type and ink, in his most impressive style :

" The situation at the car-shops has assumed a serious phase, and a strike is imminent. Matters came to a focus day before yesterday, and may now be said to have reached an acute stage. It is expected that the carpenters—of whom quite a number are employed on repair work—will be the first to go out unless certain demands which they are to make to-day are promptly acceded to by General Cornish's local representative.

" Both sides maintain the strictest secrecy, but from reliable sources the *Herald* gathers that the men will insist upon Mr. Branyon being taken back by the company.

" Another grievance of the men, and one in which they should have the sympathy of the entire community, is their objection to working with the manager's father, who came here recently from the East and has since been employed in the shops. It has been learned that he is an ex-convict who was sentenced for a long term of imprisonment in June, 1875, for the murder of Thomas Sharp, at Burton, Massachusetts.

"He was only recently set at liberty, and the men are naturally incensed and indignant at having to work with him. Still another grievance is the new schedule of wages.

"A committee representing every department in the shops and possessing the fullest authority, met last night at the Odd Fellows' Hall on South Main Street, but their deliberations were secret. A well-authenticated rumor has it, however, that the most complete harmony prevailed, and that the employés are pledged to drastic measures unless they get fair treatment from the company."

Ryder tacked a moral to this, and the moral was that labor required a champion to protect it from the soulless greed and grinding tyranny of the great corporations which had sprung into existence under the fostering wing of corrupt legislation. Of course "the Picturesque Statesman from Old Hanover" was the Hercules who was prepared to right these wrongs of honest industry, and to curb the power of Cornish, whose vampire lusts fattened on the sweat of the toiler, and especially the toiler at Antioch.

A copy of the paper was evidently sent the "Picturesque Statesman," who had just commenced his canvass, for in its very next issue the *Herald* was able to print a telegram in which he "heartily endorsed the sentiments embodied in the *Herald's* ringing editorial on the situation at Antioch," and declared himself a unit with his fellow-citizens of whatever party in their heroic struggle for a fair day's wage for a fair day's work. He also expressed himself as honored by their confidence, as, indeed, he might well have been.

Dan digested the *Herald's* report along with his

breakfast. Half an hour later, when he reached the office, he found McClintock waiting for him.

"The men want to see you, Mr. Oakley. They were going to send their committee in here, but I told 'em you'd come out to them."

"All right. It's just as well you did." And Oakley followed him from the office.

"Did you read the *Herald's* yap this morning?" inquired the master-mechanic.

"Yes," said Dan, "I did. It was rather funny, wasn't it?"

"The town will be owing Ryder a coat of tar and feathers presently. He'll make these fools think they've got a reason to be sore on the company."

The men were clustered about the great open door of the works in their shirt-sleeves. From behind them, in the silence and the shadow, came the pleasant, droning sound of machinery, like the humming of a million bees. There was something dogged and reckless in the very way they stood around, with folded arms, or slouched nervously to and fro.

Dan singled out Bentick and Joe Stokes, and three or four others, as the committee, and made straight towards them.

"Well, men, what do you want?" he asked, briskly.

"We represent every department in the shops, sir," said Bentick, civilly, "and we consider Branyon's discharge as unjust. We want him taken back."

"And suppose I won't take him back, what are you going to do about it—eh?" asked Dan, good-naturedly, and, not waiting for a reply, with old-

time deftness he swung himself up into an empty flat-car which stood close at hand and faced his assembled workmen.

"You know why Branyon was dismissed. It was a business none of you have much reason to be proud of, but I am willing to let him come back on condition he first offers an apology to McClintock and to me. Unless he does he can never set his foot inside these doors again while I remain here. I agree to this, because I don't wish to make him a scapegoat for the rest of you, and I don't wish those dependent on him to suffer."

He avoided looking in McClintock's direction. He felt, rather than saw, that the latter was shaking his head in strong disapproval of his course. The committee and the men exchanged grins. The boss was weakening. They had scored twice. First against Roger Oakley, and now for Branyon.

"I guess Branyon would as lief be excused from making an apology, if it's all the same to Milt," said Bentick, less civilly than before, and there was a ripple of smothered laughter from the crowd.

Dan set his lips, and said, sternly but quietly, "That's for him to decide."

"Well, we'll tell him what you say, and if he's ready to eat humble-pie there won't be no kick coming from us," remarked Bentick, impartially.

"Is this all?" asked Oakley.

"No, we can't see the cut." And a murmur of approval came from the men.

Dan looked out over the crowd. Why couldn't

they see that the final victory was in his hands? "Be guided by me," he said, earnestly, "and take my word for it; the cut is necessary. I'll meet you half-way in the Branyon matter; let it go at that."

"We want our old wages," insisted Bentick, doggedly.

"It is out of the question; the shops are running behind; they are not earning any money, they never have, and it's as much to your interests as mine, or General Cornish's, to do your full part in making them profitable."

He pleaded with unmistakable sincerity in his tones, and now he looked at McClintock, who nodded his head. This was the stiff talk he liked to hear, and had expected from Oakley.

The committee turned to the men, and the men sullenly shook their heads. Some one whispered, "He'll knuckle. He's got to. We'll make him."

Dan caught the sense of what was said, if not the words.

"Wages can't go back until the business in the shops warrants it. If you will continue to work under the present arrangement, good and well. If not, I see no way to meet your demands. You will have to strike. That, however, is an alternative I trust you will carefully weigh before you commit yourselves. Once the shops are closed it will not be policy to open them until fall, perhaps not until the first of the year. But if you can afford to lie idle all summer, it's your own affair. That's exactly what it means if you strike."

He jumped down from the car, and would have left them then and there, but Bentick stepped in front of him.

"Can't we talk it over, Mr. Oakley?"

"There is nothing to talk over, Bentick. Settle it among yourselves." And he marched off up the tracks, with McClintock following in his wake and commending the stand he had taken.

The first emotion of the men was one of profound and depressing surprise at the abruptness with which Oakley had terminated the interview, and his evident willingness to close the shops, a move they had not counted on. It dashed their courage.

"We'll call his bluff," cried Bentick, and the men gave a faint cheer. They were not so sure it was a bluff, after all. It looked real enough.

There were those who thought, with a guilty pang, of wives and children at home, and no pay-day—the fortnightly haven of rest towards which they lived. And there were the customarily reckless souls, who thirsted for excitement at any price, and who were willing to see the trouble to a finish. These ruled, as they usually do. Not a man returned to work. Instead, they hung about the yards and canvassed the situation. Finally the theory was advanced that, if the shops were closed, it would serve to bring down Cornish's wrath on Oakley, and probably result in his immediate dismissal. This theory found instant favor, and straightway became a conviction with the majority.

At length all agreed to strike, and the whistle in

the shops was set shrieking its dismal protest. The men swarmed into the building, where each got together his kit of tools. They were quite jolly now, and laughed and jested a good deal. Presently they were streaming off up-town, with their coats over their arms, and the strike was on.

An unusual stillness fell on the yards and in the shops. The belts, as they swept on and on in endless revolutions, cut this stillness with a sharp, incisive hiss. The machinery seemed to hammer at it, as if to beat out some lasting echo. Then, gradually, the volume of sound lessened. It mumbled to a dotage of decreasing force, and then everything stopped with a sudden jar. The shops had shut down.

McClintock came from the office and entered the works, pulling the big doors to after him. He wanted to see that all was made snug. He cursed loudly as he strode through the deserted building. It was the first time since he had been with the road that the shops had been closed, and it affected him strangely.

The place held a dreadful, ghostly inertness. The belts and shafting, with its innumerable cogs and connections, reached out like the heavy-knuckled tentacles of some great, lifeless monster. The sunlight stole through the broken, cobwebbed windows, to fall on heaps of rusty iron and heaps of dirty shavings.

In the engine-room he discovered Smith Roberts and his assistant, Joe Webber, banking the fires, preparatory to leaving. They were the only men

about the place. Roberts closed a furnace-door with a bang, threw down his shovel, and drew a grimy arm across his forehead.

"Did you ever see such a lot of lunkheads, Milt? I'll bet they'll be kicking themselves good and hard before they get to the wind-up of this."

McClintock looked with singular affection at the swelling girths of iron which held the panting lungs of the monster the men had doomed to silence, and swore his most elaborate oath.

"No, I never did, Smith. You'd think they had money to burn the way they chucked their job."

"When do you suppose I'll get a chance to build steam again?"

"Oakley says we won't start up before the first of September."

CHAPTER XVII

THE first weeks of the strike slipped by without excitement. Harvest time came and went. A rainless August browned the earth and seared the woods with its heat, but nothing happened to vary the dull monotony. The shops, a sepulchre of sound, stood silent and empty. General Cornish, in the rôle of the avenger, did not appear on the scene, to Oakley's discomfiture and to the joy of the men. A sullen sadness rested on the town. The women began to develop shrewish tempers and a trying conversational habit, while their husbands squandered their rapidly dwindling means in the saloons. There was large talk and a variety of threats, but no lawlessness.

Simultaneously with the inauguration of the strike, Jeffy reappeared mysteriously. He hinted darkly at foreign travel under singularly favorable auspices, and intimated that he had been sojourning in a community where there was always some one to "throw a few whiskeys" into him when his "coppers got hot," and where he had "fed his face" three times a day, so bounteous was the charity.

At intervals a rumor was given currency that Oakley was on the verge of starting up with imported

labor, and the men, dividing the watches, met each train; but only familiar types, such as the casual commercial traveller with his grips, the farmer from up or down the line, with his inevitable paper parcels, and the stray wayfarer were seen to step from the Huckleberry's battered coaches. Finally it dawned upon the men that Dan was bent on starving them into submission.

Ryder had displayed what, for him, was a most unusual activity. Almost every day he held conferences with the leaders of the strike, and his personal influence went far towards keeping the men in line. Indeed, his part in the whole affair was much more important than was generally recognized.

The political campaign had started, and Kenyon was booked to speak in Antioch. It was understood in advance that he would declare for the strikers, and his coming caused a welcome flutter of excitement.

The statesman arrived on No. 7, and the reception committee met him at the station in two carriages. It included Cap Roberts, the Hon. Jeb Barrows, Ryder, Joe Stokes, and Bentick. The two last were an inspiration of the editor's, and proved a popular success.

The brass-band hired for the occasion discoursed patriotic airs, as Kenyon, in a long linen duster and a limp, wilted collar, presented himself at the door of the smoker. The great man was all blandness and suavity—an oily suavity that oozed and trickled from every pore.

The crowd on the platform gave a faint, unenthu-

siastic cheer as it caught sight of him. It had been more interested in staring at Bentick and Stokes. They looked so excessively uncomfortable.

Mr. Kenyon climbed down the steps and shook hands with Mr. Ryder. Then, bowing and smiling to the right and left, he crossed the platform, leaning on the editor's arm. At the carriages there were more greetings. Stokes and Bentick were formally presented, and the Congressman mounted to a place beside them, whereat the crowd cheered again, and Stokes and Bentick looked, if possible, more miserable than before. They had a sneaking idea that a show was being made of them. Ryder took his place in the second carriage, with Cap Roberts and the Hon. Jeb Barrows, and the procession moved off up-town to the hotel, preceded by the band playing a lively two-step out of tune, and followed by a troop of bare-legged urchins.

After supper the statesman was serenaded by the band, and a little later the members of the Young Men's Kenyon Club, attired in cotton-flannel uniforms, marched across from the *Herald* office to escort him to the Rink, where he was to speak. He appeared radiant in a Prince Albert and a shiny tile, and a *boutonnière*, this time leaning on the arm of Mr. Stokes, to the huge disgust of that worthy mechanic, who did not know that a statesman had to lean on somebody's arm. It is hoary tradition, and yet it had a certain significance, too, if it were meant to indicate that Kenyon couldn't keep straight unless he was propped.

A wave of fitful enthusiasm swept the assembled crowd, and Mr. Stokes's youngest son, Samuel, aged six, burst into tears, no one knew why, and was led out of the press by an elder brother, who alternately slapped him and wiped his nose on his cap.

Mr. Kenyon, smiling his unwearied, mirthless smile, seated himself in his carriage. Mr. Ryder, slightly bored and wholly cynical, followed his example. Mr. Stokes and Mr. Bentick, perspiring and abject, and looking for all the world like two criminals, dropped dejectedly into the places assigned them. Only Cap Roberts and the Hon. Jeb Barrows seemed entirely at ease. They were campaign fixtures. The band emitted a harmony-destroying crash, while Mr. Jimmy Smith, the drum-major, performed sundry bewildering passes with his gilt staff. The Young Men's Kenyon Club fell over its own feet into line, and the procession started for the Rink. It was a truly inspiring moment.

As soon as the tail of the procession was clear of the curb, it developed that Clarence and Spide were marshalling a rival demonstration. Six small and exceedingly dirty youngsters, with reeking torches, headed by Clarence and his trusty lieutenant, fell gravely in at the rear of the Kenyon Club. Clarence was leaning on Spide's arm. Pussy Roberts preceded them, giving a highly successful imitation of Mr. Jimmy Smith. He owned the six torches, and it was unsafe to suppress him, but the others spoke disparagingly of his performance as a side-show.

Since an early hour of the evening the people had

been gathering at the Rink. It was also the Opera-House, where, during the winter months, an occasional repertory company appeared in "East Lynn," the "New Magdalen," or Tom Robertson's "Caste."

The place was two-thirds full at a quarter to eight, when a fleet courier arrived with the gratifying news that the procession was just leaving the square, and that Kenyon was riding with his hat off, and in familiar discourse with Stokes and Bentick.

Presently out of the distance drifted the first strains of the band. A little later Cap. Roberts and the Hon. Jeb Barrows appeared on the make-shift stage from the wings. There was an applausive murmur, for the Hon. Jeb was a popular character. It was said of him that he always carried a map of the United States in tobacco juice on his shirt front. He was bottle-nosed and red faced. No man could truthfully say he had ever seen him drunk, nor had any one ever seen him sober. He shunned extremes. Next, the band filed into the balcony, and was laboriously sweating its way through the national anthem, when Kenyon and Ryder appeared, followed by the wretched Stokes and Bentick. A burst of applause shook the house. When it subsided, the editor stepped to the front of the stage. With words that halted, for the experience was a new one, he introduced the guest of the evening.

It was generally agreed afterwards that it had been a great privilege to hear Kenyon. No one knew exactly what it was all about, but that was a minor consideration. The Congressman was well on

towards the end of his speech, and had reached the local situation, which he was handling in what the *Herald* subsequently described as "a masterly fashion, cool, logical, and convincing," when Oakley wandered in, and, unobserved, took a seat near the door. He glanced about him glumly. There had been a time when these people had been, in their way, his friends. Now those nearest him even avoided looking in his direction. At last he became conscious that some one far down near the stage, and at the other side of the building, was nodding and smiling at him. It was Dr. Emory. Mrs. Emory and Constance were with him. Dan caught the fine outline of the latter's profile. She was smiling an amused smile. It was her first political meeting, and she was finding it quite as funny as Ryder had said it would be.

Dan listened idly, hearing only a word now and then. At length a sentence roused him. The speaker was advising the men to stand for their rights. He rose hastily, and turned to leave; he had heard enough; but some one cried out, "Here's Oakley," and instantly every one in the place was staring at him.

Kenyon took a step nearer the foot-lights. Either he misunderstood or else he wished to provoke an argument, for he said, with slippery civility: "I shall be very pleased to listen to Mr. Oakley's side of the question. This is a free country, and I don't deny him or any man the right to express his views. The fact that I am unalterably opposed to the power

he represents is no bar to the expression here of his opinion."

Oakley's face was crimson. He paused irresolutely; he saw the jeer on Ryder's lips, and the desire possessed him to tell these people what fools they were to listen to the cheap, lungy patriotism of the demagogue on the stage.

He rested a hand on the back of the chair in front of him, and leaned forward with an arm extended at the speaker, but his eyes were fixed on Miss Emory's face. She was smiling at him encouragingly, he thought, bidding him to speak.

"This is doubtless your opportunity," he said, "but I would like to ask what earthly interest you have in Antioch beyond the votes it may give you?"

Kenyon smiled blandly and turned for one fleeting instant to wink at Ryder. "And my reply is this: What about the twenty-million-dollar specimen of American manhood who is dodging around London on the money he's made here in this State—yes, and in this town? He's gone to England to break his way into London society, and, incidentally, to marry his daughter to a title."

A roar of laughter greeted this sally.

"That may be," retorted Oakley, hotly, "but Antioch has been getting its share of his money, too. Don't forget that. There's not a store-keeper in this audience whose bank account will not show, in hard American dollars, what General Cornish does for Antioch when Antioch is willing to let him do for it. But, granted that what you have said is true,

who can best afford to meet the present situation? General Cornish or these men? On whom does the hardship fall heavier, on them or on him?"

"That was not the spirit which prevailed at Bunker Hill and Lexington! No, thank God! our fathers did not stop to count the cost, and we have our battles to-day just as vital to the cause of humanity; and I, for one, would rather see the strong arm of labor wither in its socket than submit to wrong or injustice!"

Oakley choked down his disgust and moved towards the door. There was applause and one or two cat-calls. Not heeding them, he made his way from the building. He had reached the street when a detaining hand was placed upon his arm. He turned savagely, but it proved to be only Turner Joyce, who stepped to his side, with a cheerful:

"Good-evening, Mr. Oakley. They seem to be having a very gay time in there, don't they?"

"Have you been in?" demanded Oakley, grimly.

"I? Oh, no! I have just been taking a picture home."

"Well," said Oakley, "I have just been making a damned fool of myself. I hope that is something you are never guilty of, Mr. Joyce?" Joyce laughed, and tucked his hand through his companion's arm.

"Doesn't every one do that occasionally?" he asked.

Dan shook off his bitterness. Recently he had been seeing a great deal of the little artist and his wife, who were about the only friends he or his father

had left in Antioch. They walked on in silence. Joyce was too tactful to ask any questions concerning his friend's affairs, so he ventured an impersonal criticism on Kenyon, with the modest diffidence of a man who knows he is going counter to public sentiment.

"Neither Ruth nor I had any curiosity to hear him speak to-night. I heard him when he was here last. It may be my bringing up, but I do like things that are not altogether rotten, and I'm afraid I count him as sort of decayed." Then he added: "I suppose everybody was at the Rink to-night?"

"The place was packed."

"It promises to be a lively campaign, I believe, but I take very little interest in politics. My own concerns occupy most of my time. Won't you come in, Mr. Oakley?" for they had reached his gate.

On the little side porch which opened off the kitchen they found Ruth. She rose with a pleased air of animation when she saw who was with her husband. Oakley had lived up to his reputation as a patron of the arts. He had not forgotten, in spite of his anxieties, the promise made Joyce months before, and at that very moment, safely bestowed in Mrs. Joyce's possession, were two formidable-looking strips of heavy pink paper, which guaranteed the passage of the holder to New York and return.

"I hope this confounded strike is not going to interfere with you, Mr. Joyce," said Oakley, as he seated himself. He had discovered that they liked to talk about their own plans and hopes, and the trip

East was the chief of these. Already he had considered it with them from every conceivable point of view.

"It is aggravating, for, of course, if people haven't money they can't very well afford to have pictures painted. But Ruth is managing splendidly. I really don't think it will make any special difference."

"I am determined Turner shall not miss this opportunity. I think, if it wasn't for me, Mr. Oakley, he'd give up most everything he wants to do, or has set his heart on."

"He's lucky to have you, then. Most men need looking after."

"I'm sure I do," observed the little artist, with commendable meekness. He was keenly alive to his own shortcomings. "I'd never get any sort of prices for my work if she didn't take a hand in the bargaining."

"Some one has to be mercenary," said Ruth, apologetically. "It's all very well to go around with your head in the clouds, but it don't pay."

"No, it don't pay," agreed Dan.

There was a long pause, which a cricket improved to make itself heard above the sweep of the night wind through the tree-tops. Then Ruth said: "I saw Miss Emory to-day. She asked about you."

Mrs. Joyce and her husband had taken a passionate interest in Oakley's love affair, and divined the utter wreck of his hopes.

"Did she? I saw her at the Rink, too, but of course not to speak with."

Turner Joyce trod gently but encouragingly on

his wife's foot. He felt that Oakley would be none the worse for a little cheer, and he had unbounded faith in his wife's delicacy and tact. She was just the person for such a message.

"She seemed—that is, I gathered from what she said, and it wasn't so much what she said as what she didn't say—"

Dan laughed outright, and Joyce joined in with a panic-stricken chuckle. Ruth was making as bad a botch of the business as he could have made.

"I am not at all sensitive," said Dan, with sudden candor. "I have admired her immensely; I do still, for the matter of that."

"Then why don't you go there?"

"I can't, Mrs. Joyce. You know why."

"But I think she looks at it differently now."

Oakley shook his head.

"No, she doesn't. There's just one way she can look at it."

"Women are always changing their minds," persisted Ruth. It occurred to her that Constance had been at her worst in her relation with Oakley. If she cared a scrap for him, why hadn't she stood by him when he needed it most? The little artist blinked tenderly at his wife. He was lost in admiration at her courage. He would not have dared to give their friend this comfort.

The conversation languished. They heard the strains of the band when the meeting at the Rink broke up, and the voices of the people on the street, and then there was silence again.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE hot days dragged on. Dan and his father moved down to the shops. Two cots were placed in the pattern-room, where they slept, and where Roger Oakley spent most of his time reading his Bible or in brooding over the situation. Their meals were brought to them from the hotel. It was not that Dan suspected the men of any sinister intentions, but he felt it was just as well that they should understand the utter futility of any lawlessness, and, besides, his father was much happier in the solitude of the empty shops than he could have been elsewhere in Antioch. All day long he followed McClintock about, helping with such odd jobs as were necessary to keep the machinery in perfect order. He was completely crushed and broken in spirit. He had aged, too.

At the office Dan saw only Holt and McClintock. Sick of Kerr's presence, and exasperated at his evident sympathy for the strikers—a sympathy he was at no pains to conceal—he had laid him off, a step that was tantamount to dismissal. Miss Walton was absent on her vacation, which he extended from week to week. It was maddening to him to have her around with nothing to do, for he and Holt found it

difficult to keep decently busy themselves, now the shops had closed.

Holloway, the vice-president of the road, visited Antioch just once during the early days of the strike. He approved—being of an approving disposition—of all Oakley had done, and then went back home to Chicago, after telling him not to yield a single point in the fight.

"We've got to starve 'em into submission," said this genial soul. "There's nothing like an empty stomach to sap a man's courage, especially when he's got a houseful of hungry, squalling brats. I don't know but what you'd better arrange to get in foreigners. Americans are too independent."

But Oakley was opposed to this. "The men will be glad enough to accept the new scale of wages a little later, and the lesson won't be wasted on them."

"Yes, I know, but the question is, do we want 'em? I wish Cornish was here. I think he'd advise some radical move. He's all fight."

Oakley, however, was devoutly thankful that the general was in England, where he hoped he would stay. He had no wish to see the men ruined. A wholesome lesson would suffice. He was much relieved when the time arrived to escort Holloway to his train.

All this while the *Herald* continued its attacks, but Dan no longer minded them. Nothing Ryder could say could augment his unpopularity. It had reached its finality. He never guessed that, indirectly at least, Constance Emory was responsible for by far

the greater part of Ryder's present bitterness. She objected to his partisanship of the men, and this only served to increase his verbal intemperance. But, in spite of the antagonism of their views, they remained friends. Constance was willing to endure much from Ryder that she would have resented from any one else. She liked him, and she was sorry for him; he seemed unhappy, and she imagined he suffered as she herself suffered, and from the same cause. There was still another motive for her forbearance, which, perhaps, she did not fully realize. The strike and Oakley had become a mania with the editor, and from him she was able to learn what Dan was doing.

The unpopularity of his son was a source of infinite grief to Roger Oakley. The more so as he took the burden of it on his own shoulders. He brooded over it until presently he decided that he would have a talk with Ryder and explain matters to him, and ask him to discontinue his abuse of Dan. There was a streak in the old convict's mind which was hardly sane, for no man spends the best years of his life in prison and comes out as clear-headed as he goes in.

As he pottered about the shops with McClintock, he meditated on his project. He was sure, if he could show Ryder where he was wrong and unfair, he would hasten to make amends. It never occurred to him that Ryder had merely followed in the wake of public opinion, giving it definite expression.

One evening—and he chose the hour when he knew

Antioch would be at supper and the streets deserted—he stole from the shops, without telling Dan where he was going, as he had a shrewd idea that he would put a veto on his scheme did he know of it.

With all his courage his pace slackened as he approached the *Herald* office. He possessed unbounded respect for print, and still greater respect for the man who spoke in print.

The door stood open, and he looked in over the top of his steel-bowed spectacles. The office was dark and shadowy, but from an inner room, where the presses stood, a light shone. While he hesitated, the half-grown boy who was Griff's chief assistant came from the office. Roger Oakley placed a hand on his shoulder.

"Is Mr. Ryder in, sonny?" he asked.

"Yes, he's in the back room, where you see the light."

"Thank you."

He found Ryder busy making up, by the light of a single dingy lamp, for the *Herald* went to press in the morning. Griff gave a start of surprise when he saw who his visitor was; then he said, sharply, "Well, sir, what can I do for you?"

It was the first time the old convict and the editor had met, and Roger Oakley, peering over his spectacles, studied Ryder's face in his usual slow fashion. At last he said: "I hope I am not intruding, Mr. Ryder, for I'd like to speak with you."

"Then be quick about it," snapped Griff. "Don't you see I'm busy?"

With the utmost deliberation the old convict took from his pocket a large red-and-yellow bandanna handkerchief. Then he removed his hat and wiped his face and neck with elaborate thoroughness. When he finally spoke he dropped his voice to an impressive whisper. "I don't think you understand Dannie, Mr. Ryder, or the reasons for the trouble down at the shops."

"Don't I? Well, I'll be charmed to hear your explanation." And he put down the rule with which he had been measuring one of the printed columns on the table before him.

Without being asked Roger Oakley seated himself in a chair by the door. He placed his hat and handkerchief on a corner of the table, and took off his spectacles, which he put into their case. Ryder watched him with curious interest.

"I knew we could settle this, Mr. Ryder," said he, with friendly simplicity. "You've been unfair to my son. That was because you did not understand. When you do, I am certain you will do what you can to make right the wrong you have done him."

A vicious, sinister smile wreathed Ryder's lips. He nodded. "Go on."

"Dannie's done nothing to you to make you wish to hurt him—for you are hurting him. He don't admit it, but I know."

"I hope so," said Ryder, tersely. "I should hate to think my energy had been entirely wasted."

A look of pained surprise crossed Roger Oakley's face. He was quite shocked at the unchristian

feeling Griff was displaying. "No, you don't mean that!" he made haste to say. "You can't mean it."

"Can't I?" cynically.

Roger Oakley stole a glance from under his thick, bushy eyebrows at the editor. He wondered if an apt quotation from the Scriptures would be of any assistance. The moral logic with which he had intended to overwhelm him had somehow gone astray. He presented the singular spectacle of a man who was in the wrong, and who knew he was in the wrong and was yet determined to persist in it.

"There's something I'll tell you that I haven't told any one else." He glanced again at Ryder to see the effect of the proposed confidence, and again the latter nodded for him to go on.

"I am going away. I haven't told my son yet, but I've got it all planned, and when I am gone you won't have any reason to hate Dannie, will you?"

"That's an admirable idea, Mr. Oakley, and if Dannie, as you call him, has half your good-sense he'll follow your example."

"No; he can't leave. He must stay. He's the manager of the road," with evident pride. "He's got to stay, but I'll go. Won't that do just as well?" a little anxiously, for he could not fathom the look on Ryder's dark face. Ryder only gave him a smile in answer, and he continued, hurriedly:

"You see, the trouble's been about me and my working in the shops. If I hadn't come here there'd have been no strike. As for Dannie, he's made a man of himself. You don't know, and I don't know,

how hard he's worked and how faithful he's been. What I've done mustn't reflect on him. It all happened when he was a little boy—so high," extending his hand.

"Mr. Oakley," said Ryder, coldly and insultingly, "I propose, if I can, to make this town too hot to hold your son, and I am grateful to you for the unconscious compliment you have paid me by this visit."

"Dannie don't know I came," quickly.

"No, I don't suppose he does. I take it it was an inspiration of your own."

Roger Oakley had risen from his seat.

"What's Dannie ever done to you?" he asked, with just the least perceptible tremor in his tones.

Ryder shrugged his shoulders. "We don't need him in Antioch."

The old man mastered his wrath, and said, gently:

"You can't afford to be unfair, Mr. Ryder. No one can afford to be unfair. You are too young a man to persevere in what you know to be wrong."

To maintain his composure required a great effort. In the riotous days of his youth he had concluded most arguments in which he had become involved with his fists. Aged and broken, his religion overlay his still vigorous physical strength but thinly, as a veneer. He squared his massive shoulders and stood erect, like a man in his prime, and glowered heavily on the editor.

"I trust you have always been able to make right your guiding star," retorted Ryder, jeeringly. The

anger instantly faded from the old convict's face. He was recalled to himself.

Ordinarily, that is, in the presence of others, Ryder would have felt bound to treat Roger Oakley with the deference due to his years. Alone, as they were, he was restrained by no such obligation. He was in an ugly mood, and he proceeded to give it rein.

"I wish to hell you'd mind your own business," he said, suddenly. "What do you mean by coming here to tell me what I ought to do? If you want to know, I'll tell you what I'm going to do. I am going to hound you and that precious son of yours out of this part of the country."

The old man straightened up again as Ryder spoke. The restraint of years dropped from him in a twinkling. He told him he was a scoundrel, and he prefaced it with an oath—a slip he did not notice in his excitement.

"Hey! What's that?"

"You're a damned scoundrel!" repeated Roger Oakley, white with rage. He took a step around the table and came nearer the editor. "I don't know but what I ought to break every bone in your body! You are trying to ruin my son!" He hit the table a mighty blow with his clinched fist, and, thrusting his head forward, glared into Ryder's face.

"You have turned his friends against him. Why, he ain't got none left any more. They have all gone over to the other side; and you done it, you done it, and it's got to stop!"

Ryder had been taken aback for the moment by

Roger Oakley's fierce anger, which vibrated in his voice and flashed in his dark, sunken eyes.

"Get out of here," he shouted, losing control of himself. "Get out or, damn you, I'll kick you out!"

"When I'm ready to go I'll leave," retorted the old man, calmly, "and that will be when I've said my say."

"You'll go now," and he shoved him in the direction of the door. The shove was almost a blow, and as it fell on his broad chest Roger Oakley gave a hoarse, inarticulate cry and struck out with his heavy hand. Ryder staggered back, caught at the end of the table as he plunged past it, and fell his length upon the floor. The breath whistled sharply from the old man's lips. "There," he muttered, "you'll keep your hands off!"

Ryder did not speak nor move. All was hushed and still in the room. Suddenly a nervous chill seized the old convict. He shook from head to heel.

"I didn't mean to hit you," he said, speaking to the prostrate figure at his feet. "Here, let me help you."

He stooped and felt around on the floor until he found Ryder's hand. He released it instantly to take the lamp from the table. Then he knelt beside the editor. In the corner where the latter lay stood a rusty wood-stove. In his fall Griff's head had struck against it.

The lamp shook in Roger Oakley's hand like a leaf in a gale. Ryder's eyes were open and seemed to look into his own with a mute reproach. For the

rest he lay quite limp, his head twisted to one side. The old man felt of his heart. One or two minutes elapsed. His bearing was one of feverish intensity. He heard three men loiter by on the street, and the sound of their footfalls die off in the distance, but Ryder's heart had ceased to beat. Fully convinced of this, he returned the lamp to the table and, sitting down in the chair by the door, covered his face with his hands and sobbed aloud.

Over and over he murmured: "I've killed him, I've killed him! Poor boy! poor boy! I didn't go to do it!"

Presently he got up and made a second examination. The man was dead past every doubt. His first impulse was to surrender himself to the town marshal, as he had done once before under similar circumstances.

Then he thought of Dan.

No, he must escape, and perhaps it would never be known who had killed Ryder. His death might even be attributed to an accident. In his excitement he forgot the boy he had met at the door. That incident had passed entirely from his mind, and he did not remember the meeting until days afterwards.

He had been utterly indifferent to his own danger, but now he extinguished the lamp and made his way cautiously into the outer room and peered into the street. As he crouched in the darkness by the door he heard the town bell strike the hour. He counted the strokes. It was eight o'clock. An instant later and he was hurrying down the street, fleeing

from the ghastly horror of the white, upturned face, and the eyes, with their look of mute reproach.

When he reached the railroad track at the foot of Main Street, he paused irresolutely.

"If I could see Dannie once more, just once more!" he muttered, under his breath; but he crossed the tracks with a single, longing look turned towards the shops, a black blur in the night a thousand yards distant.

Main Street became a dusty country road south of the tracks. He left it at this point and skirted a cornfield, going in the direction of the creek.

At the shops Dan had waited supper for his father until half-past seven, when he decided he must have gone up-town, probably to the Joyces'. So he had eaten his supper alone. Then he drew his chair in front of an open window and lighted his pipe. It was very hot in the office, and by-and-by he carried his lamp into the pattern-room, where he and his father slept. He arranged their two cots, blew out the light, which seemed to add to the heat, partly undressed, and lay down. He heard the town bell strike eight, and then the half-hour. Shortly after this he must have fallen asleep, for all at once he awoke with a start. From off in the night a confusion of sounds reached him. The town bell was ringing the alarm. At first he thought it was a fire, but there was no light in the sky, and the bell rang on and on.

He got up and put on his coat and hat and started out.

It was six blocks to the *Herald* office, and as he neared it he could distinguish a group of excited, half-dressed men and women where they clustered on the sidewalk before the building. A carriage was standing in the street.

He elbowed into the crowd unnoticed and unrecognized. A small boy, who had climbed into the low boughs of a maple-tree, now shouted in a perfect frenzy of excitement: "Hi! They are bringing him out! Jimmy Smith's got him by the legs!"

At the same moment Chris. Berry appeared in the doorway. The crowd stood on tiptoe, breathless, tense, and waiting.

"Drive up a little closter, Tom," Berry called to the man in the carriage. Then he stepped to one side, and two men pushed past him carrying the body of Ryder between them. The crowd gave a groan.

CHAPTER XIX

RYDER'S murder furnished Antioch with a sensation the like of which it had not known in many a day. It was one long, breathless shudder, ramified with contingent horrors.

Dippy Ellsworth remembered that when he drove up in his cart on the night of the tragedy to light the street lamp which stood on the corner by the *Herald* office his horse had balked and refused to go near the curb. It was generally conceded that the sagacious brute smelled blood. Dippy himself said he would not sell that horse for a thousand dollars, and it was admitted on all sides that such an animal possessed a value hard to reckon in mere dollars and cents.

Three men recalled that they had passed the *Herald* office and noticed that the door stood open. Within twenty-four hours they were hearing groans, and within a week, cries for help, but they were not encouraged.

Of course the real hero was Bob Bennett, Ryder's assistant, who had discovered the body when he went back to the office at half-past eight to close the forms. His account of the finding of Ryder dead on the floor was an exceedingly grizzly narrative, delightfully

conducive of the shivers. He had been the quietest of youths, but two weeks after the murder he left for Chicago. He said there might be those who could stand it, but Antioch was too slow for him.

Not less remarkable was Ryder's posthumous fame. Men who had never known him in life now spoke of him with trembling voices and every outward evidence of the sincerest sorrow. It was as if they had sustained a personal loss, for his championship of the strike had given him a great popularity, and his murder, growing out of this championship, as all preferred to believe, made his death seem a species of martyrdom.

Indeed, the mere fact that he had been murdered would have been sufficient to make him popular at any time. He had supplied Antioch with a glorious sensation. It was something to talk over and discuss and shudder at, and the town was grateful and happy, with the deep, calm joy of a perfect emotion.

It determined to give him a funeral which should be creditable alike to the cause for which he had died and to the manner of his death. So widespread was the feeling that none should be denied a share in this universal expression of respect and grief that Jeffy found it easy to borrow five pairs of trousers, four coats, and a white vest to wear to the funeral; but, in spite of these unusual preparations, he was unable to be present.

Meanwhile Dan had been arrested, examined, and set at liberty again, in the face of the prevailing sentiment that he should be held. No one doubted

—he himself least of all—that Roger Oakley had killed Ryder. Bob Bennett recalled their meeting as he left the office to go home for supper on the night of the murder, and a red-and-yellow bandanna handkerchief was found under the table which Dan identified as having belonged to his father.

Kenyon came to Antioch and made his re-election almost certain by the offer of a reward of five hundred dollars for the arrest and conviction of the murderer. This stimulated a wonderful measure of activity. Parties of men and boys were soon scouring the woods and fields in quest of the old convict.

The day preceding that of the funeral a dusty countryman, on a hard-ridden plough-horse, dashed into town with the news that a man who answered perfectly to the description of Roger Oakley had been seen the night before twenty-six miles north of Antioch, at a place called Barrow's Saw Mills, where he had stopped at a store and made a number of purchases. Then he had struck off through the woods. It was also learned that he had eaten his breakfast the morning after the murder at a farmhouse midway between Antioch and Barrow's Saw Mills. The farmer's wife had, at his request, put up a lunch for him. Later in the day a man at work in a field had seen and spoken with him.

There was neither railroad, telegraph, nor telephone at Barrow's Saw Mills, and the fugitive had evidently considered it safe to venture into the place, trusting that he was ahead of the news of his crime. It was on the edge of a sparsely settled district, and

to the north of it was the unbroken wilderness stretching away to the lakes and the Wisconsin line.

The morning of the funeral an extra edition of the *Herald* was issued, which contained a glowing account of Ryder's life and achievements. It was an open secret that it was from the gifted pen of Kenyon. This notable enterprise was one of the wonders of the day. Everybody wanted a *Herald* as a souvenir of the occasion, and nearly five hundred copies were sold.

All that morning the country people, in unheard-of numbers, flocked into town. As Clarence remarked to Spide, it was just like a circus day. The noon train from Buckhorn Junction arrived crowded to the doors, as did the one-o'clock train from Harrison. Antioch had never known anything like it.

The funeral was at two o'clock from the little white frame Methodist church, but long before the appointed hour it was crowded to the verge of suffocation, and the anxious, waiting throng overflowed into the yard and street, with never a hope of wedging into the building, much less securing seats.

A delegation of the strikers, the Young Men's Kenyon Club, of which Ryder was a member, and a representative body of citizens escorted the remains to the church. These were the people he had jeered at, whose simple joys he had ridiculed, and whose griefs he had made light of, but they would gladly have forgiven him his sarcasms even had they known of them. He had become a hero and a martyr.

Chris Berry and Cap Roberts were in charge of

the arrangements. On the night of the murder the former had beaten his rival to the *Herald* office by exactly three minutes, and had never left Ryder until he lay in the most costly casket in his shop.

It was admitted afterwards by thoughtful men, who were accustomed to weigh their opinions carefully, that Mr. Williamson, the minister, had never delivered so moving an address, nor one that contained so obvious a moral. The drift of his remarks was that the death of their brilliant and distinguished fellow-townsman should serve as a warning to all that there was no time like the present in which to prepare for the life everlasting. He assured his audience that each hour of existence should be devoted to consecration and silent testimony; otherwise, what did it avail? It was not enough that Ryder had thrown the weight of his personal influence and exceptional talents on the side of sound morality and civic usefulness. And as he soared on from point to point, his hearers soared with him, and when he rounded in on each well-tried climax, they rounded in with him. He never failed them once. They always knew what he was going to say before it was said, and were ready for the thrill when the thrill was due. It might have seemed that Mr. Williamson was paid a salary merely to make an uncertain hereafter yet more uncomfortable and uncertain, but Antioch took its religion hot, with a shiver and a threat of blue flame.

When Mr. Williamson sat down Mr. Kenyon rose. As a layman he could be entirely eulogistic. He

was sure of the faith which through life had been the guiding star of the departed. He had seen it instanced by numerous acts of eminently Christian benevolence, and on those rare occasions when he had spoken of his hopes and fears he had, in spite of his shrinking modesty, shown that his standards of Christian duty were both lofty and consistent.

Here the Hon. Jeb Barrows, who had been dozing peacefully, awoke with a start, and gazed with wide, bulging eyes at the speaker. He followed Mr. Kenyon, and, though he tried hard, he couldn't recall any expression of Ryder's, at the Red Star bar or elsewhere, which indicated that there was any spiritual uplift to his nature which he fed at secret altars; so he pictured the friend and citizen, and the dead fared well at his hands, perhaps better than he was conscious of, for he said no more than he believed.

Then came the prayer and hymn, to be succeeded by a heavy, solemn pause, and Mr. Williamson stepped to the front of the platform.

"All those who care to view the remains—and I presume there are many here who will wish to look upon the face of our dead friend before it is conveyed to its final resting-place—will please form in line at the rear of the edifice and advance quietly up the right aisle, passing across the church as quickly as possible and thence down the left aisle and on out through the door. This will prevent confusion and make it much pleasanter for all."

There was a rustle of skirts and the awkward shuffling of many feet as the congregation formed

in line; then it filed slowly up the aisle to where Chris Berry stood, weazened and dry, with a vulture look on his face and a vulture touch to his hands that now and again picked at the flowers which were banked about the coffin.

The Emorys, partly out of regard for public sentiment, had attended the funeral, for, as the doctor said, they were the only real friends Griff had in the town. They had known and liked him when the rest of Antioch was dubiously critical of the new-comer, whose ways were not its ways.

When the congregation thronged up the aisle, Constance, who had endured the long service, which to her was unspeakably grotesque and horrible, in shocked if silent rebellion slipped her hand into her mother's. "Take me away," she whispered, brokenly, "or I shall cry out! Take me away!"

Mrs. Emory hesitated. It seemed a desertion of a trust to go and leave Griff to these strangers, who had been brought there by morbid curiosity. Constance guessed what was passing in her mind.

"Papa will remain if it is necessary."

Mrs. Emory touched the doctor on the shoulder. "We're going home, John; Constance doesn't feel well; but you stay."

When they reached the street the last vestige of Constance's self-control vanished utterly. "Wasn't it awful!" she sobbed, "and his life had only just begun! And to be snuffed out like this, when there was everything to live for!"

Mrs. Emory, surprised at the sudden show of feel-

ing, looked into her daughter's face. Constance understood the look.

"No, no! He was only a friend! He could never have been more than that. Poor, poor Griff!"

"I am glad for your sake, dearie," said Mrs. Emory, gently.

"I wasn't very kind to him at the last, but I couldn't know—I couldn't know," she moaned.

She was not much given to these confidences, even with her mother. Usually she never questioned the wisdom or righteousness of her own acts, and it was not her habit to put them to the test of a less generous judgment. But she was remembering her last meeting with Ryder. It had been the day before his death; he had told her that he loved her, and she had flared up, furious and resentful, with the dull, accusing ache of many days in her heart, and a cruel readiness to make him suffer. She had tried to convince herself afterwards that it was only his vanity that was hurt.

Then she thought of Oakley. She had been thinking of him all day, wondering where he was, if he had left Antioch, and not daring to ask. They were going up the path now towards the house, and she turned to her mother again.

"What do they say of Mr. Oakley—I mean Mr. Dan Oakley? I don't know why, but I'm more sorry for him than I am for Griff; he has so much to bear!"

"I heard your father say he was still here. I suppose he has to remain. He can't choose."

"What will be done with his father if he is captured? Will they—" She could not bring herself to finish the sentence.

"Goodness knows! I wouldn't worry about him," said Mrs. Emory, in a tone of considerable asperity. "He's made all the trouble, and I haven't a particle of patience with him!"

CHAPTER XX

BY three o'clock the saloons and stores, which had closed at noon, opened their doors, and Antioch emerged from the shadow of its funeral gloom.

By four o'clock a long procession of carriages and wagons was rumbling out of town. Those who had come from a distance were going home, but many lingered in the hope that the excitement was not all past.

An hour later a rumor reached Antioch that Roger Oakley had been captured. It spread about the streets like wildfire and penetrated to the stores and saloons. At first it was not believed.

Just who was responsible for the rumor no one knew, and no one cared, but soon the additional facts were being vouched for by a score of excited men that a search-party from Barrow's Saw Mills, which had been trailing the fugitive for two days, had effected his capture after a desperate fight in the northern woods, and were bringing him to Antioch for identification. It was generally understood that if the prisoner proved to be Roger Oakley he would be spared the uncertainty of a trial. The threat was made openly that he would be strung up to the first convenient lamp-post. As Mr. Britt remarked

to a customer from Harrison, for whom he was mixing a cocktail:

"It 'd be a pity to keep a man of his years waiting; and what's the use of spending thousands of dollars for a conviction, anyhow, when everybody knows he done it?"

At this juncture Jim Brown, the sheriff, and Joe Weaver, the town marshal, were seen to cross the square with an air of importance and preoccupation. It was noted casually that the right-hand coat-pocket of each sagged suggestively. They disappeared into McElroy's livery-stable. Fifty men and boys rushed precipitately in pursuit, and were just in time to see the two officers pass out at the back of the stable and jump into a light road-cart that stood in the alley. A moment later and they were whirling off up-town.

All previous doubt vanished instantly. It was agreed on all sides that they were probably acting on private information, and had gone to bring in the prisoner. So strong was this conviction that a number of young men, whose teams were hitched about the square, promptly followed, and soon an anxious cavalcade emptied itself into the dusty country road.

Just beyond the corporation line the North Street, as it was called, forked. Mr. Brown and his companion had taken the road which bore to the west and led straight to Barrow's Saw Mills. Those who were first to reach the forks could still see the road-cart a black dot in the distance.

The afternoon passed, and the dusk of evening came. Those of the townspeople who were still hanging about the square went home to supper. Unless a man could hire or borrow a horse there was not much temptation to start off on a wild-goose chase, which, after all, might end only at Barrow's Saw Mills.

Fortunately for him, Dan Oakley had gone to Chicago that morning, intending to see Holloway and resign. In view of what had happened it was impossible for him to remain in Antioch, nor could General Cornish expect him to.

Milton McClintock was at supper with his family, when Mrs. Stapleton, who lived next door, broke in upon them without ceremony, crying, excitedly:

"They've got him, and they're going to lynch him!"

Then she as suddenly disappeared. McClintock, from where he sat, holding a piece of bread within an inch of his lips, and his mouth wide open to receive it, could see her through the window, her gray hair dishevelled and tossed about her face, running from house to house, a gaunt rumor in flapping calico skirts.

He sprang to his feet when he saw her vanish around the corner of Lou Bentick's house across the way. "You keep the children in, Mary," he said, sharply. "Don't let them into the street." And, snatching up his hat and coat, he made for the door, but his wife was there ahead of him and threw her arms about his neck.

"For God's sake, Milt, stay with the boys and

me!" she ejaculated. "You don't know what may happen!"

Outside they heard the trampling of many feet coming nearer and nearer. They listened breathlessly.

"You don't know what may happen!" she repeated.

"Yes, I do, and they mustn't do it!" unclasping her hands. "Jim will be needing help." The sheriff was his wife's brother. "He's promised me he'd hang the old man himself, or no one else should."

There was silence now in the street. The crowd had swept past the house.

"But the town's full of strangers. You can't do anything, and Jim can't!"

"We can try. Look out for the children!"

And he was gone.

Mrs. McClintock turned to the boys, who were still at the table. "Go up-stairs to your room and stay there until I tell you to come down," she commanded, peremptorily. "There, don't bother me with questions!" For Joe, the youngest boy, was already whimpering. The other two, with white, scared faces, sat bolt upright in their chairs. Some danger threatened; they didn't know what this danger was, and their very ignorance added to their terror.

"Do what I say!" she cried. At this they left the table and marched towards the stairs. Joe found courage to say:

"Ain't you coming, too? George's afraid." But

his mother did not hear him. She was at the window closing the shutters. In the next yard she saw old Mrs. Smith, Mrs. Stapleton's mother, carrying her potted plants into the house and scolding in a shrill, querulous voice.

McClintock, pulling on his coat as he ran, hurried up the street past the little white frame Methodist church. The crowd had the start of him, and the town seemed deserted, except for the women and children, who were everywhere, at open doors and windows, some pallid and pitying, some ugly with the brutal excitement they had caught from brothers or husbands.

As he passed the Emorys', he heard his name called. He glanced around, and saw the doctor standing on the porch with Mrs. Emory and Constance.

"Will you go with me, McClintock?" the physician cried. At the same moment the boy drove his team to the door. McClintock took the fence at a bound and ran up the drive.

"There's no time to lose," he panted. "But," with a sudden, sickening sense of helplessness, "I don't know that we can stop them."

"At least he will not be alone."

It was Constance who spoke. She was thinking of Oakley as struggling single-handed to save his father from the howling, cursing rabble which had rushed up the street ten minutes before.

"No, he won't be alone," said McClintock, not understanding whom it was she meant. He climbed in beside the doctor.

"You haven't seen him?" the latter asked, as he took the reins from the boy.

"Seen who?"

"Dan Oakley."

"He's on his way to Chicago. Went this morning."

"Thank God for that!" and he pulled in his horses to call back to Constance that Oakley had left Antioch. A look of instant relief came into her face. He turned again to McClintock.

"This is a bad business."

"Yes, we don't want no lynching, but it's lucky Oakley isn't here. I hadn't thought of what he'd do if he was."

"What a pity he ever sent for his father! but who could have foreseen this?" said the doctor, sadly. McClintock shook his head.

"I can't believe the old man killed Ryder in cold blood. Why, he's as gentle as a lamb."

As they left the town, off to the right in a field they saw a bareheaded woman racing after her two runaway sons, and then the distant shouts of men, mingled with the shrill cries of boys, reached their ears. The doctor shook out his reins and plied his whip.

"What if we are too late!" he said.

For answer McClintock swore. He was fearing that himself.

Two minutes later and they were up with the rear of the mob, where it straggled along on foot, sweating and dusty and hoarsely articulate. A little

farther on and it was lost to sight in a thicketed dip of the road. Out of this black shadow buggy after buggy flashed to show in the red dusk that lay on the treeless hill-side beyond. On the mob's either flank, but keeping well out of the reach of their elders, slunk and skulked the village urchins.

"Looks as if all Antioch was here to-night," commented McClintock, grimly.

"So much the better for us; surely they are not all gone mad," answered the doctor.

"I wouldn't give a button for his chances."

The doctor drove recklessly into the crowd, which scattered to the right and left.

McClintock, bending low, scanned the faces which were raised towards them.

"The whole township's here. I don't know one in ten," he said, straightening up.

"I wish I could manage to run over a few," muttered the doctor, savagely.

As they neared the forks of the road Dr. Emory pulled in his horses. A heavy farm-wagon blocked the way, and the driver was stolidly indifferent alike to his entreaties and to McClintock's threat to break his head for him if he didn't move on. They were still shouting at him, when a savage cry swelled up from the throats of those in advance. The murderer was being brought in from the east road.

"The brutes!" muttered the doctor, and he turned helplessly to McClintock. "What are we going to do? What can we do?"

By way of answer McClintock stood up.

"I wish I could see Jim."

But Jim had taken the west road three hours before, and was driving towards Barrow's Saw Mills as fast as McElroy's best team could take him. When he reached there it was enough to make one's blood run cold to hear the good man curse.

"You wait here, doctor," cried McClintock. "You can't get past, and they seem to be coming this way now."

"Look out for yourself, Milt!"

"Never fear for me."

He jumped down into the dusty, trampled road, and foot by foot fought his way forward.

As he had said, those in front were turning back. The result was a horrible jam, for those behind were still struggling to get within sight of the murderer. A drunken man at McClintock's elbow was shouting, "Lynch him!" at the top of his lungs.

The master-mechanic wrenched an arm free and struck at him with the flat of his hand. The man appeared surprised, but not at all angry. He merely wiped the blood from his lips and asked, in an injured tone, which conveyed a mild reproof, "What did you want to do that for? I don't know you," and as he sought to maintain his place at McClintock's side he kept repeating, "Say, neighbor, I don't know you. You certainly got the advantage of me."

Soon McClintock was in the very thick of the mob, and then he saw the captive. His hands were bound and he was tied with ropes to the front seat of a buck-

board drawn by two jaded horses. His captors were three iron-jawed, hard-faced countrymen. They were armed with shot-guns, and were enjoying their splendid triumph to the full.

McClintock gave only one look at the prisoner. An agony of fear was on him. The collar of his shirt was stiff with blood from a wounded face. His hat was gone, and his coat was torn. Scared and wondering, his eyes shifted uneasily over the crowd.

But the one look sufficed McClintock, and he lost all interest in the scene.

There would be no lynching that night, for the man was not Roger Oakley. Further than that, he was gray-haired and burly; he was as unlike the old convict as one man could well be unlike another.

Suddenly the cry was raised, "It ain't him. You fellows got the wrong man!"

The cry was taken up and bandied back down the road. The mob drew a great, free breath of rejoicing. It became good-natured with a noisy hilarity. The iron-jawed countrymen glanced around sheepishly.

"You are sure about that?" one inquired. "He answers the description all right."

It was hard to have to abandon the idea of the rewards. "What have you been doing to him?" asked half a dozen voices in chorus They felt a friendly interest in the poor bound wretch in the buckboard; perhaps, too, they were grateful to him because he was the wrong man.

"Oh, nothing much," uneasily, "only he put up a hell of a fight."

"Of course he did. He didn't want to be hanged!" And there was a good-natured roar from the crowd. Already those nearest the prisoner were reaching up to throw off the ropes that bound him. His captors looked on in stupid surprise, but did not seek to interfere.

The prisoner himself, now that he saw he was surrounded by well-wishers, and being in a somewhat surly temper, which was pardonable enough under the circumstances, fell to complaining bitterly and loudly of the treatment he had received. Presently the mob began to disperse, some to slink back into town, rather ashamed of their fury, while the ever-lengthening procession which had followed the four men in the buckboard since early in the day faced about and drove off into the night.

An hour afterwards and the prisoner was airing his grievances in sagacious Mr. Britt's saloon, whither he had been conveyed by the latter gentleman, who had been quick to recognize that, temporarily, at least, he possessed great drawing-powers. He was only a battered vagabond on his way East from the harvests in the Dakota wheat-fields, and he knew that he had looked into the very eyes of death. As he limped about the place, not disdaining to drink with whoever offered to pay for his refreshment, he nursed a bruised and blackened ear, where some enthusiast had planted his fist.

"Just suppose they hadn't seen I was the wrong man! Gosh damn 'em! they'd a strung me up to

the nearest sapling. I'd like to meet the cuss that punched me in the ear!" The crowd smiled tolerantly and benevolently upon him.

"How did they come to get you?" asked one of his auditors.

"I was doing a flit across the State on foot looking for work, and camping in the woods nights. How the bloody blazes was I to know you'd had a murder in your jay town? They jumped on me while I was asleep, that's what they done. Three of 'em, and when I says, 'What the hell you want of me?' one of 'em yells, 'We know you. Surrender!' and jabs the butt of his gun into my jaw, and over I go. Then another one yells, 'He's feeling for his knife!' and he rushes in and lets drive with his fist and fetches me a soaker in the neck."

About the same hour two small figures brushed past Chris Berry as he came up Main Street, and he heard a familiar voice say: "My, wasn't it a close call, Spide? He was just saved by the skin of his teeth!"

A hand was extended, and the speaker felt himself seized by the ear, and, glancing up, looked into his father's face.

"You come along home with me, son," said the undertaker. "Your ma 'll have a word to say to you. She's been wanting to lay her hands on you all day."

"See you later, Spide," Clarence managed to gasp, and then he moved off with a certain jaunty buoyancy, as though he trod on air.

CHAPTER XXI

WHEN Roger Oakley fled from Antioch on the night of the murder he was resolved that, happen what might, he would not be taken.

For half an hour he traversed back alleys and grass-grown "side streets," seeing no one and unseen, and presently found himself to the north of the town.

Then he sat down to rest and consider the situation.

He was on the smooth, round top of a hill-side. At his back were woods and fields, while down in the hollow below him, beyond a middle space that was neither town nor country, he saw the lights of Antioch twinkling among the trees. Dannie was there somewhere, wondering why he did not return. Nearer at hand, across a narrow lane, where the rag-weed and jimson and pokeberry flourished rankly, was the cemetery.

In the first peaceful month of his stay in Antioch he had walked out there almost every Sunday afternoon to smoke his pipe and meditate. He had liked to hear the blackbirds calling overhead in the dark pines, and he had a more than passing fondness for tombstone literature. Next to the Bible it seemed

about the soundest kind of reading. He would seat himself beside a grave whose tenant had been singularly pre-eminent as possessing all the virtues, and, in friendly fellowship with the dead, watch the shadows marshalled by the distant woodlands grow from short to long, or listen to the noisy cawing of the crows off in the cornfields.

The night was profoundly still, until suddenly the town bell rang the alarm. The old convict's face blanched at the sound, and he came slowly to his feet. The bell rang on. The lights among the trees grew in number, dogs barked, there was the murmur of voices. He clapped his hands to his ears and plunged into the woods.

He had no clear idea of where he was going, but all night long he plodded steadily forward, his one thought to be as far from Antioch as possible by morning. When at last morning came, with its song of half-awakened birds and its level streaks of light piercing the gray dawn, he remembered that he was hungry, and that he had eaten nothing since noon the day before. He stopped at the first farmhouse he came to for breakfast, and at his request the farmer's wife put up a lunch for him to carry away.

It was night again when he reached Barrow's Saw Mills. He ventured boldly into the one general store and made a number of purchases. The storekeeper was frankly curious to learn what he was doing and where he was going, but the old convict met his questions with surly reserve.

When he left the store he took the one road out of

the place, and half a mile farther on forsook the road for the woods.

It was nearly midnight when he went into camp. He built a fire and toasted some thin strips of bacon. He made his supper of these and a few crackers. He realized that he must harbor his slender stock of provisions.

He had told himself over and over that he was not fit to live among men. He would have to dwell alone like a dangerous animal, shunning his fellows. The solitude and the loneliness suited him. He would make a permanent camp somewhere close to the lakes, in the wildest spot he could find, and end his days there.

He carried in his pocket a small railroad map of the State, and in the morning, after a careful study of it, marked out his course. That day, and for several days following, he plodded on and on in a tireless, patient fashion, and with but the briefest stops at noon for his meagre lunch. Each morning he was up and on his way with the first glimmer of light, and he kept his even pace until the glow faded from the sky in the west.

Beyond Barrow's Saw Mills the pine-woods stretched away to the north in one unbroken wilderness. At long intervals he passed loggers' camps, and more rarely a farm in the forest; but he avoided these. Instinct told him that the news of Ryder's murder had travelled far and wide. In all that range of country there was no inhabited spot where he dare show his face.

Now that he had evolved a definite purpose he was quite cheerful and happy, save for occasional spells of depression and bitter self-accusation, but the excitement of his flight buoyed him up amazingly.

He had distanced and outwitted pursuit, and his old pride in his physical strength and superiority returned. The woods never ceased to interest him. There was a mighty freedom about them, a freedom he shared and joyed in. He felt he could tramp on forever, with the scent of the pines filling his nostrils and the sweep of the wind in his ears. His muscles seemed of iron. There was cunning and craft, too, in the life he was living.

The days were sultry August days. No rain had fallen in weeks, and the earth was a dead, dry brown. A hot haze quivered under the great trees. Off in the north, against which his face was set, a long, low, black cloud lay on the horizon. Sometimes the wind lifted it higher, and it sifted down dark threads of color against the softer blue of the summer sky. Presently the wind brought the odor of smoke. At first it was almost imperceptible—a suggestion merely, but by-and-by it was in every breath he drew. The forest was on fire ahead of him. He judged that the tide of devastation was rolling nearer, and he veered to the west. Then one evening he saw what he had not seen before—a dull red light that shone sullenly above the pines. The next day the smoke was thick in the woods; the wind, blowing strongly from the north, floated little wisps and wreaths of it down upon him. It rested like a heavy

mist above the cool surface of the lake, on the shores of which he had made his camp the night previous, while some thickly grown depressions he crossed were sour with the stale, rancid odor that clung to his clothes and rendered breathing difficult. There was a powdering of fine white ashes everywhere. At first it resembled a hoar-frost, and then a scanty fall of snow.

By five o'clock he gained the summit of a low ridge. From its top he was able to secure an extended view of the fire. A red line—as red as the reddest sunset —stretched away to the north as far as the eye could see. He was profoundly impressed by the spectacle. The conflagration was on a scale so gigantic that it fairly staggered him. He knew millions of feet of timber must be blazing.

He decided to remain on the ridge and study the course of the fire, so he lay down to rest. Sleep came over him, for the day had been a fatiguing one, but at midnight he awoke. A dull, roaring sound was surging through the forest, and the air was stifling. The fire had burned closer while he slept. It had reached the ridge opposite, which was nearly parallel to the one he was on, and was burning along its northern base. The ridge flattened perceptibly to the west, and already at this point a single lone line of fire had surmounted the blunt crest, and was creeping down into the valley which intervened. Presently tongues of fire shot upwards. The dark, nearer side of the ridge showed clearly in the fierce light, and soon the fire rolled over its entire length,

a long, ruddy cataract of flame. As it gained the summit it seemed to fall forward and catch fresh timber, then it raced down the slope towards the valley, forming a great red avalanche that roared and hissed and crackled and sent up vast clouds of smoke into the night.

Clearly any attempt to go farther north would be but a waste of time and strength. The fire shut him off completely in that quarter. He must retrace his steps until he was well to the south again. Then he could go either to the east or west, and perhaps work around into the burned district. The risk he ran of capture did not worry him. Indeed, he scarcely considered it. He felt certain the pursuit, if pursuit there were, had been abandoned days before. He had a shrewd idea that the fire would give people something else to think of. His only fear was that his provisions would be exhausted. When they went he knew the chances were that he would starve, but he put this fear resolutely aside whenever it obtruded itself. With care his supplies could be made to last many days.

He did not sleep any more that night, but watched the fire eat its way across the valley. When it reached the slope at his feet he shouldered his pack and started south. It was noon when he made his first halt. He rested for two hours and then resumed his march. He was now well beyond the immediate range of the conflagration. There was only an occasional faint odor of smoke in the woods. He had crossed several small streams, and he knew they would be an ob-

stacle in the path of the fire unless the wind, which was from the north, should freshen.

Night fell. He lighted a camp-fire and scraped together his bed of pine-needles, and lay down to sleep with the comforting thought that he had put a sufficient distance between himself and the burning forest. He would turn to the west when morning came. He trusted to a long day's journey to carry him out of the menaced territory. It would be easier travelling, too, for the ridges which cut the face of the country ran east and west. The sun was in the boughs of the hemlocks when he awoke. There had been a light rain during the night, and the forest world had taken on new beauty. But it grew hot and oppressive as the hours passed. The smoke thickened once more. At first he tried to believe it was only his fancy. Then the wind shifted into the east, and the woods became noticeably clearer. He pushed ahead with renewed hope. This change in the wind was a good sign. If it ever got into the south it would drive the fire back on itself.

He tramped for half the night and threw himself down and slept heavily—the sleep of utter exhaustion and weariness. It was broad day when he opened his eyes. The first sound he heard was the dull roar of the flames. He turned with a hunted, fugitive look towards the west. A bright light shone through the trees. The fire was creeping around and already encircled him on two sides. His feeling was one of bitter disappointment, fear, too, mingled with it. In the south were Ryder's friends—Dan-

nie's enemies and his. Of the east he had a horror which the study of his map did not tend to allay; there were towns there, and settlements, thickly scattered. Finally he concluded he would go forward and examine the line of fire. There might be some means by which he could make his way through it.

A journey of two miles brought him to a small watercourse. The fire was burning along the opposite bank. It blazed among the scrub and underbrush and leaped from tree to tree; first to shrivel their foliage to a dead, dry brown, and then envelop them in sheets of flame. The crackling was like the report of musketry.

Roger Oakley was awed by the sight. In spite of the smoke and heat he sat down on the trunk of a fallen pine to rest. Some birds fluttered out of the rolling masses of smoke above his head and flew south with shrill cries of alarm. A deer crossed the stream, not two hundred yards from where he sat, at a single bound. Next, two large timber wolves entered the water. They landed within a stone's throw of him, and trotted leisurely off. The heat soon drove him from his position, and he, too, sought refuge in the south. The wall of flame cut him off from the north and west, and to the east he would not go.

There was something tragic in this blocking of his way. He wondered if it was not the Lord's wish, after all, that he should be taken. This thought had been troubling him for some time. Then he remembered Dannie. Dannie, to whom he had brought

only shame and sorrow. He set his lips with grim determination. Right or wrong, the Lord's vengeance would have to wait. Perhaps He would understand the situation. He prayed that He might.

Twenty-four hours later and he had turned westward, with the desperate hope that he could cross out of the path of the fire, but the hope proved futile. There was no help for it. To the east he must go if he would escape.

It was the towns and settlements he feared most, and the people; perhaps they still continued the search. When he left the wilderness the one precaution he could take would be to travel only by night. This plan, when it was firmly fixed in his mind, greatly encouraged him. But at the end of ten hours of steady tramping he discovered that the fire surrounded him on three sides. Still he did not despair. For two days he dodged from east to west, and each day the wall of flame and smoke drew closer about him, and the distances in which he moved became less and less. And now a great fear of Antioch possessed him. The railroad ran nearly due east and west from Buckhorn Junction to Harrison, a distance of ninety-five miles. Beyond the road the country was well settled. There were thriving farms and villages. To pass through such a country without being seen was next to impossible. He felt a measure of his strength fail him, and with it went his courage. It was only the thought of Dannie that kept him on the alert. Happen what might, he would not be taken. It should go hard with the man or men who made the

attempt. He told himself this, not boastfully, but with quiet conviction. In so far as he could, as the fire crowded him back, he avoided the vicinity of Antioch and inclined towards Buckhorn Junction.

There was need of constant vigilance now, as he was in a sparsely settled section. One night some men passed quite near to the fringe of tamarack swamp where he was camped. Luckily the undergrowth was dense, and his fire had burned to a few red embers. On another occasion, just at dusk, he stumbled into a small clearing, and within plain view of the windows of a log-cabin. As he leaped back into the woods a man with a cob-pipe in his mouth came to the door of the cabin.

Roger Oakley, with the hickory staff which he had cut that day held firmly in his hands, and a fierce, wild look on his face, watched him from his cover. Presently the man turned back into the house, closing the door after him.

These experiences startled and alarmed him. He grew gaunt and haggard; a terrible weariness oppressed him; his mind became confused, and a sort of panic seized him. His provisions had failed him, but an occasional cultivated field furnished corn and potatoes, in spite of the serious misgivings he felt concerning the moral aspect of these nightly depredations. When he raided a spring-house, and carried off eggs and butter and milk, he was able to leave money behind. He conducted these transactions with scrupulous honesty.

He had been living in the wilderness three weeks,

when at last the fire drove him from cover at Buckhorn Junction. As a town the Junction was largely a fiction. There was a railroad crossing, a freight-shed, and the depot, and perhaps a score of houses scattered along a sandy stretch of country road.

The B. & A. had its connection with the M. & W. at this point. It was also the beginning of a rich agricultural district, and the woods gave place to cultivated fields and farm-lands.

It was late afternoon as Roger Oakley approached Buckhorn. When it was dark he would cross the railroad and take his chance there. He judged from the light in the sky that the fire had already burned in between Buckhorn and Antioch. This gave him a certain sense of security. Indeed, the fire surrounded Buckhorn in every quarter except the south. Where there was no timber or brush it crept along the rail-fences, or ran with tiny spurts of flame through the dry weeds and dead stubble which covered much of the cleared land.

He could see a number of people moving about, a quarter of a mile west of the depot. They were tearing down a burning fence that was in perilous proximity to some straw-stacks and a barn.

He heard and saw the 6.50 on the M. & W. pull in. This was the Chicago express; and the Huckleberry's local, which was due at Antioch at midnight, connected with it. This connection involved a wait of three hours at Buckhorn. Only one passenger left the train. He disappeared into the depot.

Roger Oakley waited until it was quite dark, and

then, leaving the strip of woods just back of the depot, where he had been hiding, stole cautiously down to the track. He had noticed that there was an engine and some freight cars on one of the sidings. He moved among them, keeping well in the shadow. Suddenly he paused. Two men emerged from the depot. They came down the platform in the direction of the cars. They were talking earnestly together. One swung himself up into the engine and lighted a torch.

He wondered what they were doing, and stole nearer.

They were standing on the platform now, and the man who held the torch had his back to him. His companion was saying something about the wires being down.

He listened intently.

Antioch was in danger, and if Antioch was in danger—Dannie—

All at once the man with the torch turned and its light suffused his face.

It was Dan Oakley.

CHAPTER XXII

DAN OAKLEY went to Chicago, intending to see Holloway and resign, but he found that the Huckleberry's vice-president was in New York on business, and no one in his office seemed to know when he would return, so he sat down and wrote a letter, telling him of the condition of affairs at Antioch, and explaining the utter futility, in view of what had happened, of his trying to cope with the situation.

He waited five days for a reply, and, none coming, wired to learn if his letter had been received. This produced results. Holloway wired back that he had the letter under consideration, and requested Oakley to remain in Chicago until he returned, but he did not say whether or not his resignation would be accepted. Since there was nothing to be done but await Holloway's pleasure in the matter, Dan employed his enforced leisure in looking about for another position. He desired a connection which would take him out of the country, for the farther away from Antioch and Constance Emory he could get the better he would be satisfied. He fancied he would like to go to South America. He was willing to accept almost any kind of a post—salary was no

longer a consideration with him. What he required was a radical change, with plenty of hard work.

It was not to be wondered at that his judgment of the case was an extreme one, or that he told himself he must make a fresh start, as his record was very much against him and his ability at a discount. While he could not fairly be held responsible for the miscarriage of his plans at Antioch, he felt their failure keenly, so keenly that could he have seen the glimmer of a hope ahead he could have gone back and taken up the struggle, but the killing of Ryder by his father made this impossible. There was nothing he could do, and his mere presence outraged the whole town. No understanding would ever be reached with the hands if he continued in control, while a new man in his place would probably have little or no difficulty in coming to an agreement with them. No doubt they were quite as sick as he had been of the fight, and if he left they would be content to count his going a victory, and waive the question of wages. It was part of the irony of the condition that the new man would find enough work contracted for to keep the shop open and running full time for the next eight or ten months. But his successor was welcome to the glory of it when he had hidden himself in some God-forsaken corner of the globe along with the other waifs and strays—the men who have left home because of their health or their accounts, and who hang around dingy seaport towns and read month-old newspapers and try to believe that the game has been worth the candle.

By far his greatest anxiety was his father. He watched the papers closely, expecting each day to read that he had been captured and sent back to Antioch, but the days slipped past, and there was no mention of him. Holt, with whom he was in constant correspondence, reported that interest in his capture had considerably abated, while the organized pursuit had entirely ceased.

Dan had the feeling that he should never see him again, and the pathos of his age and dependence tore his heart. In a manner, too, he blamed himself for the tragedy. It might have been averted had he said less about Ryder in his father's hearing. He should have known better than to discuss the strike with him.

One morning, as he left Holloway's office, he chanced to meet an acquaintance by the name of Curtice. They had been together in Denver years before, and he had known him as a rather talkative young fellow, with large hopes and a thrifty eye to the main chance. But he was the one man he would have preferred to meet, for he had been in South America and knew the field there. Apparently Curtice was equally glad to see him. He insisted upon carrying him off to his club to lunch, where it developed he was in a state of happy enthusiasm over his connection with a road that had just gone into the hands of a receiver, and a new baby, which he assured Oakley on the spur of the moment he was going to name after him.

"You see, Oakley," he explained, as they settled

themselves, "I was married after you left to a girl who had come to Denver with a consumptive brother. They boarded at the same place I did." His companion was properly interested. "Look here, how long are you going to be in the city? I want you to come and see us."

Dan avoided committing himself by saying his stay in Chicago was most uncertain. He might have to leave very soon.

"Well, then, you must drop in at my office. I wish you'd make it your headquarters while you are here."

"What about the road you are with?"

"Oh, the road! We are putting it in shape."

Oakley smiled a trifle skeptically. He recalled that even as a very young man filling a very subordinate position, Curtice had clung to the "we." Curtice saw the smile and remembered too.

"Now, see here, I'm giving it to you straight. I really am the whole thing. I've got a greenhorn for a boss, whose ignorance of the business is only equalled by his confidence in me. If you want to be nasty you can say his ignorance is responsible for much of his confidence. I've been told that before."

"Then I'll wait. I may be able to think of something better."

"There are times when I wonder if he really knows the difference between an engine's head-light and a coupling-pin. He's giving me all the rope I want, and we'll have a great passenger service when I get done. That's what I am working on now."

"But where are you going to get the funds for it? A good service costs money," said Dan.

"Oh, the road's always made money. That was the trouble." Oakley looked dense. He had heard of such things, but they had been outside of his own experience.

"The directors were a superstitious lot; they didn't believe in paying dividends, and as they had to get rid of the money somehow, they put it all out in salaries. The president's idea of the value of his own services would have been exorbitant if the road had been operating five thousand miles of track instead of five hundred. I am told a directors' meeting looked like a family reunion, and they had a most ungodly lot of nephews—nephews were everywhere. The purchasing agent was a nephew, so were two of the division superintendents. Why, the president even had a third cousin of his wife's braking on a way freight. We've kept him as a sort of curiosity, and because he was the only one in the bunch who was earning his pay."

"No wonder the stockholders went to law," said Oakley, laughing.

"Of course, when the road was taken into court its affairs were seen to be in such rotten shape that a receiver was appointed."

Oakley's business instinct asserted itself. He had forgotten for the time being that his services still belonged to Cornish. Now he said: "See here, haven't you cars you intend to rebuild?"

"We've precious few that don't need carpenter-work or paint or upholstering."

"Then send them to me at Antioch. I'll make you a price you can't get inside of, I don't care where you go."

Curtice meditated, then he asked: "How are you fixed to handle a big contract? It 'll be mostly for paint and upholstery or woodwork. We have been considering equipping works of our own, but I am afraid they are not going to materialize."

"We can handle anything," and from sheer force of habit he was all enthusiasm. He had pleasant visions of the shops running over-time, and everybody satisfied and happy. It made no difference to him that he would not be there to share in the general prosperity. With the start he had given it, the future of the Huckleberry would be assured. He decided he had better say nothing to Curtice about South America.

The upshot of this meeting was that he stuck to Curtice with a genial devotion that made him wax in his hands. They spent two days together, inspecting paintless and tattered day coaches, and on the third day Dan strolled from his friend's office buttoning his coat on a contract that would mean many thousands of dollars for Antioch. It was altogether his most brilliant achievement. He felt that there only remained for him to turn the Huckleberry over to Holloway and leave the country. He had done well by it.

Dan had been in Chicago about three weeks, when at last Holloway returned, and he proved as limp as Cornish had said he would be in a crisis. He was inclined to be critical, too, and seemed astonished that Oakley had been waiting in Chicago to see him. He experienced a convenient lapse of memory when the latter mentioned his telegram.

"I can't accept your resignation," he said, fussing nervously among the papers on his desk. "I didn't put you at Antioch; that was General Cornish's own idea, and I don't know what he'll think."

"It has gotten past the point where I care what he thinks," retorted Dan, curtly. "You must send some one else there to take hold."

"Why didn't you cable him instead of writing me?" fretfully. "I don't know what he will want, only it's pretty certain to be the very thing I sha'n't think of."

"I would have cabled him if I had considered it necessary, but it never occurred to me that my resignation would not be agreed to on the spot, as my presence in Antioch only widens the breach and increases the difficulty of a settlement with the men."

"Whom did you leave in charge?" inquired Holloway.

"Holt."

"Who's he?"

"He's Kerr's assistant," Dan explained.

"Why didn't you leave Kerr in charge?" demanded the vice-president.

"I laid him off," said Dan, in a tone of exaspera-

tion, and then he added, to forestall more questions: "He was in sympathy with the men, and he hadn't the sense to keep it to himself. I couldn't be bothered with him, so I got rid of him."

"Well, I must say you have made a frightful mess of the whole business, Oakley, but I told General Cornish from the first that you hadn't the training for the position."

Dan turned very red in the face at this, but he let it pass.

"It's too bad," murmured Holloway, still fingering the letters on the desk.

"Since you are in doubt, why don't you cable General Cornish for instructions, or, if there is a reason why you don't care to, it is not too late for me to cable," said Dan.

This proposal did not please Holloway at all, but he was unwilling to admit that he feared Cornish's displeasure, which, where he was concerned, usually took the form of present silence and a subsequent sarcasm that dealt with the faulty quality of his judgment. The sarcasm might come six months after it had been inspired, but it was certain to come sooner or later, and to be followed by a bad half-hour, which Cornish devoted to past mistakes. Indeed, Cornish's attitude towards him had become, through long association, one of chronic criticism, and he was certain to be unpleasantly affected both by what he did and by what he left undone.

"Why don't you wait until the general returns from England? That's not far off now.

Under the circumstances he'll accept your resignation."

"He will have to," said Oakley, briefly.

"Don't worry; he'll probably demand it," remarked the vice-president, disagreeably.

"If you are so sure of this, why don't you accept it?" retorted Dan.

"I have no one to appoint in your place."

"What's wrong with Holt? He'll do temporarily."

"I couldn't feel positive of his being satisfactory to General Cornish. He's a very young man, ain't he?"

"Yes, I suppose you'd call him a young man, but he has been with the road for a long time, and has a pretty level head. I have found him very trustworthy."

"I would have much greater confidence in Kerr. He's quiet and conservative, and he's had an excellent training with us."

"Well, then, you can get him. He is doing nothing, and will be glad to come."

"But you have probably succeeded in antagonizing him."

"I hope so," with sudden cheerfulness. "It was a hardship not to be able to give him a sound thrashing. That's what he deserved."

Holloway looked shocked. The young man was displaying a recklessness of temper which was most unseemly and entirely unexpected.

"I guess it will be well for you to think it over, Oakley, before you conclude to break with General

Cornish. To go now will be rather shabby of you, and you owe him fair treatment. Just remember it was those reforms of yours that started the strike, in the first place. I know—I know. What you did you did with his approval. The men are peaceable enough, ain't they?" and he glared at Oakley with mingled disfavor and weariness.

"Anybody can handle them but me."

"It won't be long until they are begging you to open the shops. They will be mighty sick of the trouble they've shouldered when their money is all gone."

"They will never come to me for that, Mr. Holloway," said Dan. "I think they would, one and all, rather starve than recognize my position."

"They'll have to. We'll make them. We mustn't let them think we are weakening."

"You don't appreciate the feeling of intense hostility they have for me."

"Of course the murder of that man—what was his name?"

"Ryder, you mean."

"Was unfortunate. I don't wonder you have some feeling about going back."

Dan smiled sadly.

The vice-president was wonderfully moderate in his choice of words. He added: "But it is really best for the interest of those concerned that you should go and do what you can to bring about a settlement."

"It would be the sheerest idiocy for me to attempt

it. The town may go hungry from now till the end of its days, but it won't have me at any price."

"I always told Cornish he should sell the road the first opportunity he got. He had the chance once and you talked him out of it. Now you don't want to stand by the situation."

"I do," said Oakley, rising. "I want to see an understanding reached with the men, and I am going to do what I can to help along. You will please to consider that I have resigned. I don't for the life of me see how you can expect me to show my face in Antioch," and with that he stalked from the place. He was thoroughly angry. He heard Holloway call after him:

"I won't accept your resignation. You'll have to wait until you see Cornish!"

Dan strode out into the street, not knowing what he would do. He was disheartened and exasperated at the stand Holloway had taken.

Presently his anger moderated and his pace slackened. He had been quite oblivious to what was passing about him, and now for the first time, above the rattle of carts and trucks, he heard the newsboys shrilly calling an extra. He caught the words, "All about the big forest fire!" repeated over and over again.

He bought a paper and opened it idly, but a double-leaded head-line arrested his attention. It was a brief special from Buckhorn Junction. He read it with feverish interest. Antioch was threatened with complete destruction by the forest fires, which

for several weeks had been raging in the northern part of the State. All traffic was suspended, and the exact condition could only be guessed at, but there had been repeated calls for help. The neighboring towns had responded to these appeals by sending fire-engines and hose, which were still waiting at Buckhorn Junction to go through. Oakley knew that the long drought had so diminished the available water supply that, in an emergency of this kind, Antioch must depend on the river.

The town derived its regular water supply from a stand-pipe, fed from a small reservoir. In ordinary seasons, and under ordinary circumstances, the force was sufficient to meet all needs, but on an occasion such as the present the equipment of the local fire department, consisting of two hose-carts and a single old-fashioned hand-engine, would be quite useless.

Oakley's hands shook as they clutched the paper. He forgot his own troubles; all in an instant he was alive to the danger that threatened Constance. She was a prisoner in the menaced town, in the very centre of an impending tragedy. The thought of her possible peril sent the blood surging away from his heart.

Ten minutes later Dan again presented himself to Holloway. His face had lost its former look of dogged determination. It had become keen and pinched with a sudden anxiety.

"It's all right, Mr. Holloway," he cried as he entered the office. "You needn't bother about my

resignation. I'll take the first train for Antioch. Have you seen this?" and he held out the crumpled page he had just torn from his newspaper.

Holloway glanced up in astonishment at this unlooked-for change of heart.

"I thought you'd conclude it was no way to treat General Cornish," he said.

"Hang Cornish! It's not on his account I'm going. The town is in a fair way to be wiped off the map. Here, read."

And he thrust the paper into Holloway's hands. "The woods to the north and west of Antioch have been blazing for two days. They have sent out call after call for help, and apparently nobody has responded yet. That's why I am going back, and for no other reason."

CHAPTER XXIII

AT Buckhorn Junction, Joe Durks, who combined the duties of telegraph operator with those of baggage-master and ticket-agent, was at his table receiving a message when Dan Oakley walked into the office. He had just stepped from the Chicago express.

"What's the latest word from Antioch, Joe?" he asked, hurriedly.

"How are you, Mr. Oakley? I got Antioch now."

"What do they say?"

"They are asking help."

The metallic clicking of the instrument before him ceased abruptly.

"What's wrong, anyhow?" He pushed back his chair and came slowly to his feet. His finger was still on the key. He tried again to call up Antioch. "They are cut off. I guess the wire is down."

The two men stared at each other in silence.

Dan's face was white in the murky, smoky twilight that filled the room. Durks looked anxious—the limit of his emotional capacity. He was a lank, colorless youth, with pale yellow tobacco stains about the corners of his mouth, and a large nose, which was superior to its surroundings.

Oakley broke silence with:

"What's gone through to-day, Joe?"

"Nothing's gone through on the B. & A. There's nothing to send from this end of the line," the operator answered, nervously.

"What went through yesterday?"

"Nothing yesterday, either."

"Where is No. 7?"

"It's down at Harrison, Mr. Oakley."

"And No. 9?"

"It's at Harrison, too."

"Do you know what they are doing at Harrison?" demanded Oakley, angrily.

It seemed criminal negligence that no apparent effort had as yet been made to reach Antioch.

"I don't," said Durks, laconically, biting his nails. "I suppose they are waiting for the fire to burn out."

"Why don't you know?" persisted Dan, tartly. His displeasure moved the operator to a fuller explanation.

"It was cut off yesterday morning. The last word I got was that No. 7 was on a siding there, and that No. 9, which started at 8.15 for Antioch, had had to push back. The fire was in between Antioch and Harrison, on both sides of the track, and blazing to beat hell."

Having reached this verbal height, he relapsed into comparative indifference.

"Where's the freight?" questioned Oakley.

"The last I heard it was trying to make Parker's Run."

"When was that?"

"That was yesterday morning, too. It had come up that far from Antioch the day before to haul out four carloads of ties. Holt gave the order. It is still there, for all I know—that is, if it ain't burned or ditched. I sent down the extra men from the yards here to help finish loading the cars. I had Holt's order for it, and supposed he knew what was wanted. They ain't come back, but they got there ahead of the freight all right."

Oakley felt this care for a few hundred dollars' worth of property to have been unnecessary, in view of the graver peril that threatened Antioch. Still, it was not Durks's fault. It was Holt who was to blame. He had probably lost his head in the general alarm and excitement.

While Harrison might be menaced by the fire, it was in a measure protected by the very nature of its surroundings. But with Antioch, where there was nothing to stay the progress of the flames, the case was different. With a north wind blowing, they could sweep over the town unhindered.

"Yesterday the wind shifted a bit to the west, and for a while they thought Antioch was out of danger," said Durks, who saw what was in Oakley's mind.

"What have you heard from the other towns?"

"They're deserted. Everybody's gone to Antioch or Harrison. There was plenty of time for that, and when No. 7 made her last run, I wired ahead that it was the only train we could send out."

"How did you get the extra men to Parker's Run?"

"Baker took 'em there on the switch engine. I sent him down again this morning to see what was the matter with the freight, but he only went to the ten-mile fill and come back. He said he couldn't go any farther. I guess he wasn't so very keen to try. He said he hadn't the money put by for his funeral expenses."

"They told me up above that the M. & W. had hauled a relief train for Antioch. What has been done with it? Have you made an effort to get it through?"

Durks looked distressed. Within the last three days flights of inspiration and judgment had been demanded of him such as he hoped would never be required again. And for forty-eight hours he had been comforting himself with the thought that about everything on wheels owned by the Huckleberry was at the western terminus of the road.

"It ain't much of a relief train, Mr. Oakley. Two cars, loaded with fire-engines and a lot of old hose. They are on the siding now."

"Were any men sent here with the relief train?" questioned Oakley.

"No; Antioch just wanted hose and engines. The water's played out, and they got to depend on the river if the fire strikes the town. They're in pretty bad shape, with nothing but one old hand-engine. You see, their water-mains are about empty and their hose-carts ain't worth a damn."

Oakley turned on his heel and strode from the office. The operator followed him. As they gained

the platform Dan paused. The very air was heavy with smoke. The sun was sinking behind a blue film. Its dull disk was the color of copper. He wondered if the same sombre darkness was settling down on Antioch. The element of danger seemed very real and present. To Dan this danger centred about Constance Emory. He quite overlooked the fact that there were several thousand other people in Antioch. Durks, at his side, rubbed the sandy bristles on his chin with the back of his hand, and tried to believe he had thought of everything and had done everything there was to do.

The woods were on fire all about the Junction, but the town itself was in no especial danger, as cultivated fields intervened to shut away the flames. In these fields Dan could see men and women busy at work tearing down fences. On a hillside a mile off a barn was blazing.

"There goes Warrick's barn," remarked the operator.

"What was the last word from Antioch? Do you remember exactly what was said?" asked Dan.

"The message was that a strong north wind was blowing, and that the town was pretty certain to burn unless the engines and hose reached there tonight; but they have been saying that for two days, and the wind's always changed at the right moment and driven the fire back."

Dan glanced along the track, and saw the relief train, consisting of an engine, tender, and two flat-cars, loaded with hose and fire-engines, on one of

the sidings. He turned on Durks with an angry scowl.

"Why haven't you tried to start that train through? It's ready."

"No one is here to go with it, Mr. Oakley. I was sort of counting on the freight crew for the job."

"Where's Baker?"

"He went home on the 6.10. He lives up at Carson, you know."

This was the first stop on the M. & W. east of Buckhorn.

"Why did you let him leave? Great God, man! Do you mean to say that he's been loafing around here all day with his hands in his pockets? He'll never pull another throttle for the Huckleberry!"

Durks did not attempt to reply to this explosion of wrath.

"Who made up the train?" demanded Dan.

"Baker did. Him and his fireman. I didn't know but the freight might come up from Parker's Run, and I wanted to be fixed for 'em. I couldn't do a thing with Baker. I told him his orders were to try and reach Antioch with the relief train, but he said he didn't care a damn who gave the order, he wasn't going to risk his life."

But Dan had lost interest in Baker.

"Look here," he cried. "You must get a fireman for me, and I'll take out the train myself."

He wondered why he had not thought of this before.

"I guess I'll manage to reach Antioch," he added,

as he ran across to the siding and swung himself into the cab.

A faded blue blouse and a pair of greasy overalls were lying on the seat in the cab. He removed his coat and vest and put them on. Durks, who had followed him, climbed up on the steps.

"You'll have to run slow, Mr. Oakley, because it's likely the heat has spread the rails, if it ain't twisted them loose from the ties," he volunteered. For answer Oakley thrust a shovel into his hands.

"Here, throw in some coal," he ordered, opening the furnace door.

Durks turned a sickly, mottled white.

"I can't leave," he gasped.

"You idiot. You don't suppose I'd take you from your post. What I want you to do is to help me get up steam."

The operator attacked the coal on the tender vigorously. He felt an immense sense of comfort.

Dan's railroad experience covered nearly every branch. So it chanced that he had fired for a year prior to taking an office position. Indeed, his first ambition had been to be an engineer. It was now quite dark, and, the fires being raked down, he lit a torch and inspected his engine with a comprehensive eye. Next he probed a two-foot oiler into the rods and bearings and filled the cups. He found a certain pleasure in the fact that the lore of the craft to which he had once aspired was still fresh in his mind.

"Baker keeps her in apple-pie order, Joe," he observed, approvingly. The operator nodded.

"He's always tinkering."

"Well, he's done tinkering for us, unless I land in a ditch to-night, with the tender on top of me."

A purring sound issued from the squat throat of the engine. It was sending aloft wreaths of light gray smoke and softly spitting red-hot cinders.

Dan climbed upon the tender and inspected the tank. Last of all he went forward and lit the headlight, and his preparations were complete. He jumped down from the cab, and stood beside Joe on the platform.

"Now," he said, cheerfully, "where's that fireman, Joe?"

"He's gone home, Mr. Oakley. He lives at Carson, too, same as Baker," faltered the operator.

"Then there's another man whose services we won't require in future. We'll have to find some one else."

"I don't think you can," ventured Durks, reluctantly. Instinct told him that this opinion would not tend to increase his popularity with Oakley.

"Why not?"

"They just won't want to go."

"Do you mean to tell me that they will allow Antioch to burn and not lift a hand to save the town?" he demanded, sternly.

He couldn't believe it.

"Well, you see, there won't any one here want to get killed; and they will think they got enough trouble of their own to keep them home."

"We can go up-town and see if we can't find a

man who thinks of more than his own skin," said Dan.

"Oh, yes, we can try," agreed Durks, apathetically, but his tone implied an unshaken conviction that the search would prove a fruitless one.

"Can't you think of any one who would like to make the trip?" Durks was thoughtful. He thanked his lucky stars that the M. & W. paid half his salary. At last he said:

"No, I can't, Mr. Oakley."

There was a sound like the crunching of cinders underfoot on the other side of the freight car near where they were standing, but neither Durks nor Oakley heard it. The operator's jaws worked steadily in quiet animal enjoyment of their task. He was still canvassing the Junction's adult male population for the individual to whom life had become sufficiently burdensome for Oakley's purpose. Dan was gazing down the track at the red blur in the sky. Back of that ruddy glow, in the path of the flames, lay Antioch. The wind was in the north. He was thinking, as he had many times in the last hour, of Constance and the Emorys. In the face of the danger that threatened he even had a friendly feeling for the rest of Antioch. It had been decent and kindly in its fashion until Ryder set to work to ruin him.

He knew he might ride into Antioch on his engine none the worse for the trip, except for a few burns, but there was the possibility of a more tragic ending. Still, whatever the result, he would have done his full part.

He faced Durks again.

"Any man who knows enough to shovel coal will do," he said.

"But no one will want to take such long chances, Mr. Oakley. Baker said it was just plain suicide."

"Hell!" and Dan swore like a brakeman out of temper, in the bad, thoughtless manner of his youth.

At the same moment a heavy, slouching figure emerged from the shadow at the opposite end of the freight car, and came hesitatingly towards the two men. Then a voice said, in gentle admonition:

"Don't swear so, Dannie. It ain't right. I'll go with you."

It was his father.

CHAPTER XXIV

ANTIOCH had grown indifferent to forest fires. They were of almost annual recurrence, and the town had come to expect them each fall. As the Hon. Jeb Barrows remarked, with cheerful optimism, voicing a popular belief, if it was intended Antioch should go that way it would have gone long ago.

But this summer the drought had been of longer duration than usual. The woods were like tinder, and the inevitable wadding from some careless hunter's gun, or the scattered embers from some camp-fire far up in the northern part of the State, had started a conflagration that was licking up miles of timber and moving steadily south behind a vast curtain of smoke that darkened half the State. It was only when the burned-out settlers from the north began to straggle in that Antioch awoke to a proper sense of its danger.

Quick upon the heels of these fugitives came the news that the half-dozen families at Barrow's Saw Mills had been forced to flee from their homes. The fire had encircled the mills in a single night, and one old man, a trapper and hunter, who lived alone in a cabin in a small clearing on the outskirts of the set-

tlement, had been burned to death in his bunk before he could be warned of his danger or help reach him.

It was then that Antioch sent out its first call for help. It needed fire-engines and hose, and it needed them badly, especially the hose, for the little reservoir from which the town drew its water supply was almost empty.

Antioch forgot the murder of Ryder. It forgot Roger Oakley, the strike, and all lesser affairs. A common danger threatened its homes, perhaps the lives of its citizens.

A score of angry men were stamping up and down the long platform across from the shops, or pushing in and out of the ugly little depot, which had taken on years in apparent age and decay in the two days during which no trains had been running.

They were abusing Holt, the railroad, and every one connected with it. For the thousandth time they demanded to know where the promised relief train was—if it had started from Buckhorn Junction, and, if it *hadn't* started, the reason of the delay.

The harried assistant-treasurer answered these questions as best he could.

"Are you going to let the town burn without making a move to save it?" demanded an excited citizen.

"You don't think I am any more anxious to see it go than you are?" retorted Holt, angrily.

"Then why don't your damn road do something to prevent it?"

"The road's doing all it can, gentlemen."

"That's a whole lot, ain't it?"

"We are cut off," said Holt, helplessly. "Everything's tied up tight."

"You can wire, can't you?"

"Yes, I can wire; I have wired."

"Well, where's the relief train, then?"

"It's at the Junction."

"It's going to do us a lot of good there, ain't it?"

"They'll send it as soon as they can get together a crew."

"Stir them up again, Holt. Tell 'em we got to have that hose and those engines, or the town's gone. It's a matter of life and death."

Holt turned back into the depot, and the crowd dispersed.

In the ticket-office he found McClintock, who had just come in from up-town. The master mechanic's face was unusually grave.

"I have been investigating the water supply with the city engineer. Things are in awful shape. The mains are about empty, and there isn't pressure enough from the stand-pipe to throw a thirty-five foot stream."

"I wish Oakley was here," muttered Holt.

"So do I. Somehow he had a knack at keeping things moving. I don't mean but what you've done your level best, Byron," he added, kindly.

"They've laid down on me at the Junction," said the younger man, bitterly.

He stepped to the door, mopping his face with his handkerchief, and stood looking down the track in the direction of Buckhorn.

"They made it so Oakley couldn't stay, and now they wonder why the relief train is hung up. All Durks says is that he can't get a crew. I tell you if Oakley was here he'd *have* to get one."

"It was a mistake to send the yard engine up to Parker's Run. If we had it here now—"

"How in hell was *I* to know we'd need it? I had to try to save those ties, and we thought the wind was shifting into the south," in fierce justification of his course.

"That's so, all right," said McClintock. "We did think the danger was past; only we shouldn't have taken any chances."

At this point they were joined by Dr. Emory.

"Anything new from Buckhorn?" he inquired, anxiously.

"No, it's the same old story. Durks ain't got anybody to send."

"Damn his indifference!" muttered McClintock.

The doctor, like Holt, fell to mopping his face with his handkerchief.

"Don't he know our danger? Don't he know we can't fight the fire without engines and hose?—that our water supply is about exhausted, and that we'll have to depend on the river?"

Holt nodded wearily.

"It looks as though we were to be left to face this situation as best we can, without help from the outside," said the doctor, uneasily.

Holt turned to McClintock.

"Isn't there some method of back-firing?"

"It's too late to try that, and, with this wind blowing, it would have been too big a risk."

He glanced moodily across the town to the north, where the black cloud hung low in the sky. He added:

"I have told my wife to keep the young ones in, no matter what happens. But Lord! they will be about as well off one place as another, when it comes to the pinch."

"I suppose so," agreed the doctor. "I am at a loss to know what precautions to take to insure the safety of Mrs. Emory and my daughter."

It was only four o'clock, but it was already quite dark in the town—a strange half-light that twisted the accustomed shape of things. The air was close, stifling; and the wind, which blew in heavy gusts, was like the breath from a furnace. The sombre twilight carried with it a horrible sense of depression. Every sound in nature was stilled; silence reigned supreme. It was the expectant hush of each living thing.

The three men stepped out on the platform. Holt and the doctor were still mopping their faces with their limp handkerchiefs. McClintock was fanning himself with his straw hat. When they spoke they unconsciously dropped their voices to a whisper.

"Those families in the North End should move out of their homes," said the doctor. "If they wait until the fire gets here, they will save nothing but what they have on their backs."

"Yes, and the houses ought to come down," added

McClintock. "There's where the fire will get its first grip on the town, and then Heaven help us!"

Night came, and so imminent seemed the danger that Antioch was roused to something like activity.

A crowd, composed almost exclusively of men, gathered early on the square before the court-house.

They had by common consent given up all hope that the relief train would be sent from Buckhorn Junction. The light in the sky told them that they were completely cut off from the outside world. The town and the woods immediately adjacent formed an island in the centre of an unbroken sea of fire. The ragged red line had crept around to the east, west, and south, but the principal danger would be from the north, where the wind drove the flames forward with resistless fury. To the south and east Billup's Fork interposed as a barrier to the progress of the fire, and on the west was a wide area of cultivated fields.

At regular intervals waves of light flooded the square, as the freshening gusts fanned the conflagration or whirled across the town great patches of black smoke. In the intervals of light a number of dark figures could be seen moving about on the roof of the court-house. Like the square below, it was crowded with anxious watchers.

The crowd jostled to and fro on the square, restless and excited, and incapable of physical quiet. Then suddenly a voice was raised and made itself heard above the tramp of feet.

"Those houses in the North End must come down!" this voice said.

There was silence, and then a many-tongued murmur. Each man present knew that the residents of the North End had sworn that they would not sacrifice their homes to the public good. If their homes must go, they much preferred to have them burn, for then the insurance companies would have to bear the loss.

"Those houses must come down!" the voice repeated.

It was McClintock who had spoken.

"Who's going to pull them down?" another voice asked. "They are ready to fight for them."

"And we ought to be just as ready to fight, if it comes to that," answered the master mechanic. "It's for the common good."

The crowd was seized with a noisy agitation. Its pent-up feelings found vent in bitter denunciation of the North End. A man—it was the Hon. Jeb Barrows—had mounted the court-house steps, and was vainly endeavoring to make himself heard. He was counselling delay, but no one listened to him. The houses must be torn down whether their owners wanted it or not. McClintock turned up the street.

"Fall in!" he shouted, and at least a hundred men fell in behind him, marching two abreast. Here and there, as they moved along, a man would forsake the line to disappear into his own gate. When he rejoined his neighbors he invariably carried an axe, pick, or crowbar.

From the square they turned into Main Street, and from Main Street into the north road, and presently

the head of the procession halted before a cluster of small frame houses resting in a hollow to their right.

"These must come down first," said McClintock. "Now we want no noise, men. We'll pass out their stuff as quietly as we can, and take it back to the square."

He swung open a gate as he spoke. "Williams keeps a team. A couple of you fellows run around to the barn and hook up."

Just then the front door opened, and Williams himself appeared on the threshold. A dog barked, other doors opened, lights gleamed in a score of windows, and the North End threw off its cloak of silence and darkness.

"Keep quiet, and let me do the talking," said McClintock over his shoulder. Then to the figure in the doorway:

"We have come to help you move, John. I take it you will be wanting to leave here shortly."

"The hell you have!" responded Williams, roughly.

"We'll give you a hand!" and the master mechanic pushed through the gate and took a step down the path.

"Hold on!" cried Williams, swinging out an arm. "I got something to say about that!"

There was a sound as of the clicking of a lock, and he presented the muzzle of a shot-gun.

"Oh, say," said McClintock, gently; "you had better not try to use that. It will only make matters worse. Your house has got to come down."

"The hell it has!"

"Yes," said McClintock, still gently. "We got to save what we can of the town."

Williams made no answer to this, but McClintock saw him draw the butt of the gun up towards his shoulder.

The men at his back were perfectly still. They filled the street, and, breathing hard, pressed heavily against the picket fence, which bent beneath the weight of their bodies.

"You'd better be reasonable. We are losing precious time," urged McClintock.

"The hell you are!"

It occurred to McClintock afterwards that there had been no great variety to Williams's remarks.

"In an hour or two this place will be on fire."

"I've got no kick coming if it burns, but it sha'n't be pulled down."

"Put up your gun, and we'll give you a lift at getting your stuff out."

"No, you won't."

McClintock kept his eyes on the muzzle of the shotgun.

"It ain't the property loss we are thinking of—it's the possible loss of life," he said, mildly.

"I'll chance it," retorted Williams, briefly.

"Well, we won't."

Williams made no reply; he merely fingered the lock of his gun.

"Put down that gun, John!" commanded McClintock, sternly.

At the same moment he reached around and took an axe from the hands of the nearest man.

"Put it down," he repeated, as he stepped quickly towards Williams.

The listening men pressed heavily against the fence in their feverish anxiety to miss nothing that was said or done. The posts snapped, and they poured precipitously into the yard. At the same moment the gun exploded, and a charge of buckshot rattled harmlessly along the pavement at McClintock's feet.

Then succeeded a sudden pause, deep, breathless, and intense, and then the crowd gave a cry—a cry that was in answer to a hoarse cheer that had reached them from the square.

An instant later the trampled front yard was deserted by all save Williams in the doorway. He still held the smoking gun to his shoulder.

CHAPTER XXV

WHEN Roger Oakley appeared on the platform at Buckhorn Junction, Durks started violently, while Dan took a quick step forward and placed a warning hand on the old convict's arm. He feared what he might say. Then he said to the operator: "He'll do. Go see if you can get Antioch. Try just once more. If you succeed, tell them the engines and hose will be there within an hour, or they need not look for them. Do you understand?"

"All right, Mr. Oakley." And Durks moved up the platform with alacrity. He was relieved of one irksome responsibility. He had his own theories as to who the stranger was, but he told himself it was none of his business

As soon as he was out of hearing, Dan turned to his father, and said, earnestly:

"Look here, daddy, I can't allow you to do it. We are neither of us popular. It's bad enough for me to have to go."

"Why can't you allow it, Dannie?" And his son recognized the same cheerful tone with which he had always met and overruled his objections.

"It will end in your arrest, and we don't want that."

"It's more than likely I'll be arrested sooner or later, anyhow," he said, with a suggestion of weariness, as if this were a matter it was a waste of time to consider. "The Lord has set His face against me. It's His wish I should return. I've been stubborn and headstrong and wouldn't see it, but look there," and he nodded towards the red western sky. "It's a summons. I got to obey, whether I want to or not."

"It won't be safe. No telling what they will do with you."

"That ain't the question, Dannie; that ain't at all the question. It's not what they'll do to me," and he softly patted the hand that rested on his arm.

Dan saw that his clothes hung loosely to his mighty frame. They were torn and stained. He had the appearance of a man who had endured hardship, privation, and toil. His glance was fugitive and anxious. "Where have you been all this while?" he asked. "Not here?"

"No, I have been living in the woods, trying to escape from the country, and the fires wouldn't let me. Wherever I went, they were there ahead of me, driving me back."

"Why did you kill him? How did it happen?" Dan added. "Or is it all a mistake? Did you do it?"

The smile faded from the old convict's lips.

"It was a sort of accident, and it was sort of carelessness, Dannie," he explained, with a touch of sullenness. "I hit him—not hard, mind you. I know I shouldn't have done it, but he was in the wrong, and he wouldn't listen to reason. I don't

know when I ever seen a man so set in his wickedness."

"And now you want to go back. Do you know what it means if you are arrested? Have you thought of that?"

Roger Oakley waved the query aside as though it concerned him not at all.

"I want to be with you," he said, wistfully. "You may not get through alive, and I want to be with you. You'll need me. There's no one you can trust as you can me, for I won't fail you, no matter what the danger is. And there's the girl, Dannie. Have you thought of her?"

Dan set his lips. "My God, I can't think of anything else."

There was a moment's silence.

"Here," said Dan, thrusting his hands into his pockets. "I am going to give you what money I have. It isn't much."

"What for, Dannie?"

"You are sure to be seen and recognized if you stay about here. Your description has been telegraphed all over the State. For that reason I'll take you with me part way. Then I'll slow up, and you can hide again. It's your only chance. I am sorry I can't do more for you. I wish I could; but perhaps we can arrange to meet afterwards."

His father smiled with the unconscious superiority of the man who firmly believes he is controlled by an intelligence infinitely wise and beyond all human conception. No amount of argument could have

convinced him that Providence was not burning millions of feet of standing timber and an occasional town solely for his guidance. In his simple seriousness he saw nothing absurd nor preposterous in the idea. He said:

"I've wanted to escape, Dannie, for your sake, not for mine. But when I seen you to-night I knew the Lord intended we should keep together. He didn't bring us here for nothing. That ain't His way. There's no one to go with you but me, and you can't go alone."

"I can — I will!" And Dan swore under his breath. He realized that no word of his could move his father. He would carry his point, just as he always had.

Durks came running along the platform from the depot.

"It's no use," shaking his head. "The wire's down. Say, you want to keep your eyes open for the freight. It may be on the siding at Parker's Run, and it may be on the main track."

Dan made a last appeal to his father.

"Won't you listen to what I say?" sinking his voice to a hoarse whisper. "They'll hang you—do you hear? If ever they lay hands on you they will show no mercy!" It did not occur to him that his father would be returning under circumstances so exceptional that public sentiment might well undergo a radical change in his favor.

Roger Oakley merely smiled as he answered, with gentle composure: "I don't think we need to worry

about that. We are in His hands, Dannie," and he raised his face to the heavens.

Dan groaned.

"Come, then," he said aloud.

"I'll throw the switch for you!" and the operator ran down the track. He was quite positive he should never see Oakley again, and he felt something akin to enthusiasm at the willing sacrifice of his life which he conceived him to be making.

Father and son stepped to the engine. The old convict mounted heavily to his post, and Dan sprang after him, his hand groping for the throttle lever. There was the hiss of steam, and Joe cried from the darkness:

"All right, come ahead!" And the engine, with its tender and two cars, began its hazardous journey.

As they slipped past him, the operator yelled his good-bye, and Dan pushed open the cab window and waved his hand.

Roger Oakley, on the narrow iron shelf between the engine and the tender, was already throwing coal into the furnace. His face wore a satisfied expression. Apparently he was utterly unmoved by the excitement of the moment, for he bent to his work as if it were the most usual of tasks, and the occasion the most commonplace. He had taken off his coat and vest and had tossed them up on the tender out of his way. Dan, looking over the boiler's end, could see his broad shoulders and the top of his head. He leaned back with his hand on the throttle.

"Father!" he called.

The old convict straightened up instantly.

"Yes, Dannie?"

"You are going with me? You are determined?"

"I thought we settled that, Dannie, before we started," he said, pleasantly, but there was a shrewd, kindly droop to the corners of his mouth, for he appreciated his victory.

"I want to know, because if I am to slow up for you I'll have to do it soon, or I'll be leaving you in worse shape than I found you."

To this his father made no direct reply. Instead he asked, "Do you think we'll reach Antioch in time to do them any good?" Dan faced about.

They slid into a straight stretch of road beyond the Junction, and the track shone yellow far ahead, where the engine looked down upon it with its single eye. Each minute their speed increased. A steady jarring and pounding had begun that grew into a dull and ponderous roar as the engine rushed forward. Dan kept a sharp watch for the freight.

As Durks had said, it might be on the siding at Parker's Run, and it might not. In the latter event, his and his father's troubles would soon be at an end.

He rose from his seat and went to the door of the cab.

"We'll take it easy for the first ten miles or so, then we'll be in the fire, and that will be our time to hit her up."

Roger Oakley nodded his acquiescence. In what he conceived to be worldly matters he was quite will-

ing to abide by Dan's judgment, for which he had profound respect.

"How fast are we going?" he asked. Dan steadied himself and listened, with a finger on his pulse, until he caught the rhythmic swing of the engine, as it jarred from one rail to another. Then he said:

"Twenty-five miles an hour."

"It ain't very fast, is it, Dannie?"

He was evidently disappointed.

"We'll do twice that presently."

The old convict looked relieved. They were running now with a strip of forest on one side of the track and cultivated fields on the other, but with each rod they covered they were edging in nearer the flames. At Parker's Run the road crossed a little stream which doubled back in the direction of Buckhorn Junction. There was nothing after that to stay the progress of the fire, and the rest of their way lay through the blazing pine-woods.

Just before they reached the ten-mile fill they came to the strip of burned timber that had sent Baker back to Buckhorn earlier in the day. Here and there a tree was still blazing, but for the most part the fire had spent its strength.

As they swung past Parker's Run a little farther on, Dan saw the freight, or, rather, what was left of it, on the siding. It had been cutting out four flat-cars loaded with ties, and he understood the difficulty at a glance. On the main track a brick-and-stone culvert spanned the Run, but the siding crossed it on a flimsy wooden bridge. This bridge had probably

been burning as the freight backed in for the flat-cars, and when it attempted to pull out the weakened structure had collapsed and the engine had gone through into the cut. It rested on its forward end, jammed between the steep banks, with its big drivers in the air. Of the cars there remained only the trucks and iron work. Near by a tool-shed had formerly stood, but that was gone, too. The wheels and gearing of a hand-car in the midst of a heap of ashes marked the spot.

Dan turned to his father. "Are you all right, daddy?" he asked.

"Yes, Dannie."

"Mind your footing. It will be pretty shaky back there."

They were still in the burned district, where a change in the wind that afternoon had driven the fire back on itself. It had made a clean sweep of everything inflammable. Luckily the road had been freshly ballasted, and the track was in fair condition to resist the flames. But an occasional tie smouldered, and from these the rushing train thrashed showers of sparks.

Dan kept his eyes fastened on the rails, which showed plainly in the jerky glare of the headlight. It was well to be careful while care was possible. By-and-by he would have to throw aside all caution and trust to chance. Now he increased his speed, and the insistent thud of the wheels drowned every other sound, even the far-off roar of the flames. At his back, at intervals, a ruddy glow shot upward into

the night, when Roger Oakley threw open the furnace door to pass in coal. Save for this it was still quite dark in the cab, where Dan sat with his hand on the throttle lever and watched the yellow streak that ran along the rails in advance of the engine. Suddenly the wall of light ahead brightened visibly, and its glare filled the cab. They were nearing the fire.

Dan jammed the little window at his elbow open and put out his head. A hot blast roared past him, and the heat of the fire was in his face. He drew the window shut. It was light as day in the cab now.

He leaned across the boiler's end, and, with a hand to his lips, called to his father, "Are you all right?"

The old man drew himself erect and crept nearer.

"What's that you say, Dannie?" he asked. His face was black with coal-dust and grime.

"Are you all right? Can you bear the heat?"

"I am doing very nicely, but this ain't a patch on what it's going to be."

"Yes, it will be much worse, though this is bad enough."

"But we can stand it. We must think of those poor people at Antioch."

"We'll stick to the engine as long as the engine sticks to the rails," said Dan, grimly. "Hadn't you better come into the cab with me? You'll be frightfully exposed when we get into the thick of it."

"Not yet, Dannie? I'll give you steam, and you drive her as hard as you can."

He turned away, shovel in hand.

Then, all in a second, and they were in the burning woods, rushing beneath trees that were blazing to their very summits. The track seemed to shake and tremble in the fierce light and fiercer heat. Burning leaves and branches were caught up to be whirled in fiery eddies back down the rails as the train tore along, for Dan was hitting her up.

Tongues of fire struck across at the two men. Smoke and fine white ashes filled their mouths and nostrils. Their bodies seemed to bake. They had been streaming wet with perspiration a moment before.

Off in the forest it was possible to see for miles. Every tree and bush stood forth distinct and separate.

Roger Oakley put down his shovel for an instant to fill a bucket with water from the tank on the tender. He plunged his head and arms in it and splashed the rest over his clothes. Dan turned to him for the last time.

"It isn't far now," he panted. "Just around the next curve and we'll see the town, if it's still there, off in the valley."

The old convict did not catch more than the half of what he said, but he smiled and nodded his head.

As they swung around the curve a dead sycamore, which the fire had girdled at the base, crashed across the track. The engine plunged into its top, rolled it over once and tossed it aside. There was the smashing of glass and the ripping of leather as the sycamore's limbs raked the cab, and Roger Oakley uttered a hoarse cry, a cry Dan did not hear, but he

turned, spitting dust and cinders from his lips, and saw the old convict still standing, shovel in hand, in the narrow gangway that separated the engine and tender.

He had set the whistle shrieking, and it cut high above the roar of the flames, for, off in the distance, under a canopy of smoke, he saw the lights of Antioch shining among the trees.

Two minutes later and they were running smoothly through the yards, with the brakes on and the hiss of escaping steam. As they slowed up beside the depot, Dan sank down on the seat in the cab, limp and exhausted. He was vaguely conscious that the platform was crowded with people, and that they were yelling at him excitedly and waving their hats, but he heard their cries only indifferently well. His ears were dead to everything except the noise of his engine, which still echoed in his tired brain.

He staggered to his feet, and was about to descend from the cab, when he saw that his father was lying face down on the iron shelf between the engine and tender. He stooped and raised him gently in his arms.

The old convict opened his eyes and looked up into his face, his lips parted as if he were about to speak, but no sound came from them.

CHAPTER XXVI

CONSTANCE EMORY and her mother, waiting quietly in their own home, heard the cheers when the noise from Dan's shrieking engine reached the crowd of desperate men on the square. Then presently they heard the rattle and clash of the fire-engines as they were dragged through the street, and were aware that the relief train had arrived, but it was not until the doctor came in some time long after midnight that they knew who had been the savior of the town.

"It's all over, dear. The fire is under control," he said, cheerfully, addressing his wife. "I guess we can go to bed now and feel pretty sure we won't be burned out before morning."

Constance put down the book she had been trying to read, and rose tiredly and stiffly from her chair beside the table.

"Then the train did come, after all?" she said.

"Yes, but not a moment too soon. I tell you we can't be grateful enough. I've been with Oakley and his father; that's what kept me," he explained.

"Oakley!" Constance cried, in amazement. "You don't mean—"

"Yes. Didn't you know that it was Oakley and his father who brought the relief train? The old man is dead. He was killed on the way. It's a miracle that either of them got through alive. Hadn't you heard?"

Constance put out her hands blindly, for a sudden mist had come before her eyes.

"Father, you don't mean that Mr. Oakley has returned to Antioch—that he is here now?"

"Yes, it seems no one else would come. Oakley was in Chicago when he first heard of the fire, and started immediately for Buckhorn, where he found the relief train. Oddly enough, he found his father there, too."

"Then there was something to the old man, after all," said Mrs. Emory, whose sympathies were as generous as they were easily aroused.

"A good deal, I should say. He must have known that he was coming back to arrest and almost certain conviction."

Constance's glance searched her father's face. She wanted to hear more of Oakley. Her heart was hungering for news of this man who had risked his life to save them. All her lingering tenderness—the unwilling growth of many days—was sweeping away the barriers of her pride. "Mr. Oakley was not hurt?" she questioned, breathlessly, pale to the lips.

"He is pretty badly shaken up, and no wonder, but he will be all right in the morning."

"Where is he now?" she asked.

Her father turned to her.

"Oakley— You look tired out, Constance. Do go to bed. I'll tell you all about it in the morning."

"Where is he now, papa?" she questioned, going to his side and clasping her hands about his arm.

"Down at the shop. They carried his father there from the train."

"Why didn't you have them bring him here?" said Mrs. Emory, quickly. "After this I won't listen to a word against either of them. I would like to show the town just how we feel in the matter."

"I suggested it, but Oakley wouldn't hear to it. But don't worry about the town. It's gone wild. You should have seen the crowd on the platform when it saw Oakley in the engine-cab. It went stark mad."

Again Constance's eyes swam with tears. The strike, the murder of Ryder, the fire, had each seemed in turn a part of the tragedy of her life at Antioch, but Oakley's return was wholly glorious.

Her father added, "I shall see Oakley in the morning, and learn if we can be of any service to him."

A little later, when Constance went to her own room, she drew forward a chair and seated herself by the window. Across the town, on the edge of the "flats," she saw dimly the long, dark outline of the railroad shop, with its single tall chimney. She thought of Oakley as alone there keeping watch at the side of the grim old murderer, who had so splendidly redeemed himself by this last sacrifice.

Great clouds of black smoke were still rolling over the town, and the woods were still blazing fiercely in

the distance. Beyond her window she heard the call of frightened birds, as they fluttered to and fro in the dull red light, and farther off, in the North End, the muffled throbbing of the fire-engines.

If she had had any doubts as to her feeling for Oakley, these doubts were now a thing of the past. She knew that she loved him. She had been petty and vain; she had put the small things of life against the great, and this was her punishment. She tried to comfort herself with the thought that she should see him in the morning; then she could tell him all. But what could she tell him? The time had gone by when she could tell him anything.

It was almost morning when she undressed and threw herself down on her bed. She was disconsolate and miserable, and the future seemed quite barren of hope or happiness. Love had come to her, and she had not known its presence. Yes, she would tell Oakley that she had been little and narrow and utterly unworthy. He had cared for her, and perhaps he would understand. She fell asleep thinking this, and did not waken until her mother called her for breakfast.

"I am waiting for your father. He has gone down to see Mr. Oakley," Mrs. Emory said when she entered the dining-room. Constance glanced at the table.

"Is he going to bring Mr. Oakley back with him?" she asked, nervously.

"He expected to. I declare, Constance, you look worn out. Didn't you sleep well?"

"No, not very. I wonder if they are coming?"

"You might go look," said her mother, and Constance hurried into the parlor. She was just in time to see her father enter the gate. He was alone. Constance flew to the front door and threw it open.

"He wouldn't come?" she cried, breathlessly.

"He's gone."

"Gone?"

"Yes, a train was made up early this morning, and he has returned to Buckhorn— Why, what's the matter, Constance?"

For Constance, with a little gasp of dismay, had slipped down into a chair, with her hands before her face.

"What is it, dear?" he questioned, anxiously. But she gave him no answer. She was crying softly, unrestrainedly. It was all over. Oakley was gone, and with him went her only hope of happiness. Yet more keen than her sense of pain and personal loss was her regret that he would never understand that she respected and admired him as he deserved.

"I am sorry, Constance, but I didn't know that you especially wanted to see him," said the doctor, awkwardly, but with a dawning comprehension of what it all meant. She made no answer.

"What is it, dear?" he repeated.

"Oh, nothing. I wanted to tell him about something; that is all. It doesn't matter now." She glanced up into his face with a sudden doubt. "You didn't see him—you are quite sure he went away

without your seeing him—you are not deceiving me?"

"Why, of course, Constance, but he'll come back."

"No, he won't, papa," shaking her head sadly. "He's gone, and he will never come back. I know him better than you do."

And then she fled promptly up-stairs to her own room.

This was the nearest Constance came to betraying her love for Oakley. She was not much given to confidences, and the ideals that had sustained her in her pride now seemed so childish and unworthy that she had no wish to dwell upon them, but whenever Dan's name was mentioned in her presence she looked frightened and guilty and avoided meeting her father's glance.

It seemed, indeed, that Oakley had taken final leave of Antioch. A new manager appeared and took formal charge of the destinies of the road. Under his direction work was resumed in the shops, for the strike had died a natural death. None of the hands were disposed to question the ten-per-cent. cut, and before the winter was over the scale of wages that had been in force before the strike was inaugurated was voluntarily restored. The town had no criticisms to make of Johnson, the new manager, a quiet, competent official; the most any one said was that he was not Oakley. That was enough. For Dan had come into his own.

Early in October there was a flutter of excitement when Turner Joyce and his wife left for the East to

be Oakley's guests. When they returned, some weeks later, they had a good deal to say about him that Antioch was frankly curious to hear.

He had taken his father to Burton, where his mother was buried. Afterwards he had joined General Cornish in New York.

While abroad, the financier had effected a combination of interests which grouped a number of roads under one management, and Dan had been made general superintendent of the consolidated lines, with his headquarters in New York City. The Joyces were but vaguely informed as to where these lines were, but they did full justice to their magnitude, as well as to the importance of Oakley's new connection.

The dull monotony of those fall days in Antioch was never forgotten by Constance Emory. She was listless and restless by turns. She had hoped that she might hear from Oakley. She even thought the Joyces might bring her some message, but none had come. Dan had taken her at her word.

She had made no friends, and, with Ryder dead and Oakley gone, she saw no one, and finally settled down into an apathy that alarmed the doctor. He, after some deliberation, suddenly announced his intention of going East to attend a medical convention.

"Shall you see Mr. Oakley?" Constance asked, with quick interest.

"Probably, if he's in New York when I get there."

Constance gave him a scared look and dropped

her eyes. But when the time drew near for his departure, she followed him about as if there were something on her mind which she wished to tell him.

The day he started, she found courage to ask:

"Won't you take me with you, papa?"

"Not this time, dear," he answered.

She was quiet for a moment, and then said:

"Papa, you are not going to tell him?"

"Tell who, Constance? What?"

"Mr. Oakley."

"What about Oakley, dear?"

She looked at him from under her long lashes, while the color slowly mounted to her cheeks.

"You are not going to tell him what you think you know?"

The doctor smiled.

"I wish you would grant me the possession of ordinary sense, Constance. I am not quite a fool."

"You are a precious," she said, kissing him.

"Thank you. What message shall I give Oakley for you?"

"None."

"None?"

"He won't want to hear from me," shyly.

"Why not?"

"Because he just won't, papa. Besides, I expect he has forgotten that such a person ever lived."

"I wouldn't be too sure of that. What was the trouble, Constance? You'd better tell me, or I may say something I shouldn't."

"Oh, you must not say anything," in alarm. "You must promise."

"Constance, what did Oakley say to you that last day he was here at the house?"

Constance's glance wandered meditatively from her father's face to the window and back again, while her color came and went. There was a far-away, wistful look in her eyes, and a sad little smile on her lips. At last she said, softly, "Oh, he said a number of things. I can't remember now all he did say."

"Did Oakley tell you he cared for you?"

Constance hesitated a moment, then, reluctantly:

"Well, yes, he did. And I let him go, thinking I didn't care for him," miserably, and with a pathetic droop of her lips, from which the smile had fled. "I didn't know, and I have been so unhappy!"

"Oh!"

Constance left the room abruptly.

When he reached New York, the first thing the doctor did was to look up Oakley. He was quick to notice a certain constraint in the young man's manner as they shook hands, but this soon passed off.

"I am awfully glad to see you," he had said. "I have thought of you again and again, and I have been on the point of writing you a score of times. I haven't forgotten your kindness to me."

"Nonsense, Oakley. I liked you, and it was a pleasure to me to be able to show my regard," responded the doctor, with hearty good-will.

"How is Mrs. Emory—and Miss Emory?"

"They are both very well. They were just a little hurt that you ran off without so much as a good-bye."

Oakley gave him a quick glance.

"She is—Miss Emory is still in Antioch?"

The doctor nodded.

"I didn't know but what she might be in the city with you," Dan explained, with evident disappointment.

"Aren't we ever going to see you in Antioch again?" inquired the doctor. He put the question with studied indifference. Dan eagerly scanned his face. The doctor fidgeted awkwardly.

"Do *you* think I'd better go back?" he asked, with a perceptible dwelling on the "you."

The doctor's face became a trifle red. He seemed to weigh the matter carefully; then he said:

"Yes, I think you'd better. Antioch would like mightily to lay hands on you."

Dan laughed happily.

"You don't suppose a fellow could dodge all that, do you? You see, I was going west to Chicago in a day or so, and I had thought to take a run on to Antioch. As a matter of fact, Cornish wants me to keep an eye on the shops. They are doing well, you know, and we don't want any falling off. But, you understand, I don't want to get let in for any fool hysterics," he added, impatiently.

Notwithstanding the supposed confidence in which telegrams are transmitted, Brown, the day

man at Antioch, generally used his own discretion in giving publicity to any facts of local interest that came under his notice. But when he wrote off Dr. Emory's message, announcing that he and Oakley were in Chicago, and would arrive in Antioch the last of the week, he held it for several hours, not quite knowing what to do. Finally he delivered it in person, a sacrifice of official dignity that only the exigencies of the occasion condoned in his eyes. As he handed it to Mrs. Emory, he said:

"It's from the doctor. You needn't be afraid to open it; he's all right. He'll be back Saturday night, and he's bringing Mr. Oakley with him. I came up to see if you had any objection to my letting the town know?"

Mrs. Emory saw no reason why the knowledge of Oakley's return should be withheld, and in less than half an hour Antioch, with bated breath, was discussing the news on street corners and over back fences.

That night the town council met in secret session to consider the weighty matter of his reception, for by common consent it was agreed that the town must take official action. It was suggested that he be given the freedom of the city. This sounded large, and met with instant favor, but when the question arose as to how the freedom of the city was conferred, the president turned, with a slightly embarrassed air, to the member who had made the motion. The member explained, with some reserve, that he believed the most striking feature had

to do with the handing over of the city keys to the guest of honor. But, unfortunately, Antioch had no city keys to deliver. The only keys that, by any stretch of the imagination, could be so called, were those of the court-house, and they were lost. Here an appeal was made to the Hon. Jeb Barrows, who was usually called in to straighten out any parliamentary tangles in which the council became involved. That eminent statesman was leaning dreamily against a pillar at the end of the council-chamber. On one of his cards he had already pencilled the brief suggestion: "Feed him, and have out the band." He handed the card to the president, and the council heaved a sigh of relief. The momentous question of Oakley's official reception was settled.

When Dan and Dr. Emory stepped from No. 7 Saturday night the station platform was crowded with men and boys. The brass-band, which Antioch loved with a love that stifled criticism, perspiring and in dire haste, was turning the street corner half a block distant. Across the tracks at the railroad shops a steam-whistle shrieked an ecstatic welcome.

Dan glanced at the doctor with a slightly puzzled air.

"What do you suppose is the matter?" he asked, unsuspiciously.

"Why, man, don't you understand? It's *you!*"

There was no need for him to say more, for the crowd had caught sight of Dan, and a hundred voices cried:

"There he is! There's Oakley!"

And in an instant Antioch, giving way to wild enthusiasm, was cheering itself black in the face, while above the sound of cheers and the crash of music, the steam-whistle at the shops shrieked and pealed.

The blood left Oakley's face. He looked down at the crowd and saw Turner Joyce. He saw McClintock and Holt and the men from the shops, who were, if possible, the noisiest of all. He turned helplessly to the doctor.

"Let's get out of this," he said between his teeth. The crowd and the noise and the excitement recalled that other night when he had ridden into Antioch. As he spoke he swung himself down from the steps of the coach, and the crowd closed about him with a glad shout of welcome.

The doctor followed more slowly. As he gained the platform, the Hon. Jeb Barrows hurried to his side.

"Where is he to go, Doc?" he panted. "To your house, or to the hotel?"

"To my house."

"All right, then. The crowd's spoiling the whole business. I've got an address of welcome in my pocket that I was to have delivered, and there's to be a supper at the Rink to-night. Don't let him get away from you."

Meanwhile, Dan had succeeded in extricating himself from the clutches of his friends, and was struggling towards a closed carriage at the end of the platform that he recognized as the Emorys'.

In his haste and the dusk of the dull October twilight, he supposed the figure he saw in the carriage to be the doctor, who had preceded him, and called to the man on the box to drive home.

As he settled himself, he said, reproachfully:

"I hope you hadn't anything to do with this?"

A slim, gloved hand was placed in his own, and a laughing voice said:

"How do you do, Mr. Oakley?"

He glanced up quickly, and found himself face to face with Constance Emory.

There was a moment's silence, and then Dan said, the courage that had brought him all the way to Antioch suddenly deserting him:

"It's too bad, isn't it? I had hoped I could slip in and out of town without any one being the wiser."

"But you can't," with a little air of triumph. "Antioch is going to entertain you. It's been in a perfect furor of excitement ever since it knew you were coming back."

"Well, I suppose there is no help for it," resignedly.

"Where is my father, Mr. Oakley?"

"I guess we left him behind," with sudden cheerfulness. He leaned forward so that he could look into her face.

"Constance, I have returned because I couldn't stay away any longer. I tried to forget, but it was no use."

She had withdrawn her hand, but he had found it

again, and now his fingers closed over it and held it fast. He was feeling a sense of ownership.

"Did you come to meet me?" he asked.

"I came to meet papa."

"But you knew I was coming, too?"

"Oh no."

It was too dark for him to see the color that was slowly mounting to her face.

"Constance, I don't believe you," he cried.

"I was not sure you were coming," Constance said, weakly.

"You might have known that I'd come back—that I couldn't stay away."

"Don't you think you have been a long time in making that discovery?"

"Well, yes, but when I saw your father—"

"What did papa say to you?" with keen suspicion in her tones.

"You mustn't blame him, Constance. It was not so much what he said as what he didn't say. I never knew any one to be quite so ostentatious about what was left unsaid."

Constance freed her hand, and, shrinking into a corner, covered her face. She had a painful realization of the direction those confidences must have taken, between her father, who only desired her happiness, and the candid Oakley, who only desired her love.

"Was there any use in my coming? You must be fair with me now. It's too serious a matter for you not to be."

"You think I was not fair once?"

"I didn't mean that, but you have changed."

"For the better, Mr. Oakley?"

"Infinitely," with blunt simplicity.

"You haven't changed a scrap. You are just as rude as you ever were."

Dan cast a hurried glance from the window.

"Constance, we won't have much more time to ourselves; we are almost home. Won't you tell me what I have come to hear—that you do care for me, and will be my wife? You know that I love you. But you mustn't send me from you a second time without hope."

"I shouldn't think you would care about me now. I wouldn't care about you if you had been as unworthy as I have been," her voice faltered. "I might have shown you that I, too, could be brave, but I let the opportunity pass, and now, when everyone is proud—"

"But I *do* care. I care a great deal, for I love you just as I have loved you from the very first."

She put out both her hands.

"If you had only looked back when you left the house that day you told me you cared—"

"What, Constance?"

"I was at the window. I thought you'd surely look back, and then you would have known—"

"My darling!"

The carriage had drawn up to the Emorys' gate.

Dan jumped out and gave Constance his hand. Off in the distance they heard the band. Constance

paused and rested her hand gently on Oakley's arm.

"Hark! Do you hear?"

"I wish they'd stop their confounded nonsense," said Dan.

"No, you can't stop them," delightedly. "Antioch feels a sense of proprietorship. But do you hear the music, Dan?"

"Yes, dear. It's the band."

"Of course it's the band. But do you know what it is *playing?*"

Oakley shook his head dubiously. She gave his arm a little pat and laughed softly.

"It might be difficult to recognize it, but it's the bridal-march from 'Lohengrin.'"

"If they stick to that, I don't care, Constance."

And side by side they went slowly and silently up the path to the house.

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